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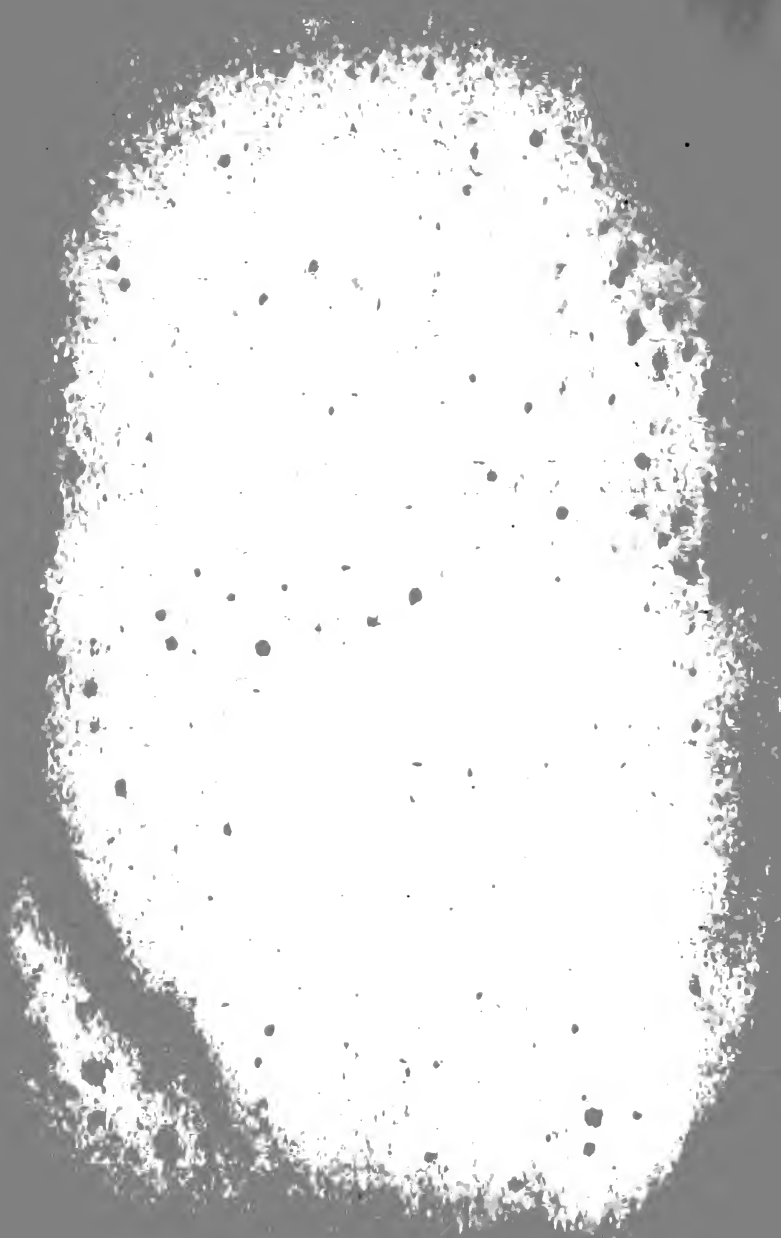
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# FRANK SINCLAIR'S WIFE,

*AND OTHER STORIES.*

BY

MRS. RIDDELL,

AUTHOR OF

"GEORGE GEITH," "TOO MUCH ALONE," "HOME, SWEET HOME,"  
"THE EARL'S PROMISE," ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 8, CATHERINE STREET, STRAND.

1874.

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PRINTED BY TAYLOR AND CO.,  
LITTLE QUEEN STREET, LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS.

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FRANK SINCLAIR'S WIFE.



# FRANK SINCLAIR'S WIFE.



## CHAPTER I.

### HOW THE STEP WAS TAKEN.

WHEN, in the face of the assembled population of Mulford-in-the-Weald, Arabella Constance Marion, daughter of the Reverend Fitzhugh St. Clair, Rector of Mulford aforesaid, promised to love, honour, and obey Frank Sinclair, I do not think, spite of the fact that her uncle, the Dean of Ringleton, assisted her father to perform the ceremony; that her mother's second cousin, Sir Arthur Landless, gave the bride away; that the Honourable Mrs. Clace, seated in her family pew, surveyed the sacrifice through double

eye-glasses with gold rims, and subsequently partook, liberally, so it seemed to Frank Sinclair, of lobster salad which he had made, and champagne which he had paid for; spite of all these causes for upliftment and social exaltation, there is still every reason to believe that Arabella Constance Marion did not think she was conferring, together with her heart and hand, a life-long obligation on the man who had wooed her successfully.

On the contrary, the great and the little world of Mulford-in-the-Weald thought Arabella Constance had taken some pains to land her lover, and was proud when, after bringing him to shore, she was able to exhibit him to the critical gaze of friends and neighbours in the character of her affianced husband. The eldest but one of eleven living children—seven of whom were daughters undowered—her chances in the matrimonial lottery could not have been considered promising, when a far-away rela-



tive going down to recruit his health at Mulford remained at the Rectory the greater part of the summer, and before the autumnal fruits were over had proposed for and married her.

Of course, the reader—already, I hope, a little interested in the fortunes of bride and bridegroom—must be anxious to know the particular attraction Frank Sinclair found in a lady aged twenty-five, already developing bones in unexpected and untoward places; already with a tendency to lines across her forehead, and occasionally inclined to be snappish towards her brothers and sisters. And, as when a writer puts a man into print he ought to keep nothing back concerning him, it may be simply stated that Mr. Sinclair was in the first instance drawn to Bella—so her friends called her—not by the beauty of her form or face—for indeed his eyes had beheld many fairer women—not by the sweetness of her voice or the grace of her movements, not by the

manner in which, skipping, and repeating, and breaking down, and trying back, she executed the "Invitation pour la Valse," not by the extent of her knowledge, which was indeed limited, or by the brilliancy of her conversational wit, that in the earlier days of their acquaintance could only be gathered from a discreet silence; but rather by the persistency with which she made the family puddings, dusted the drawing-room knick-knacks of a morning, and the quiet perseverance that she brought afternoon after afternoon, together with a pile of stockings, to one especial arbour in the vicarage grounds, where Mr. Sinclair read poetry to her, the meaning of which she did not understand, and made that "honourable and manly" proposal (so Mrs. St. Clair styled it), which converted him in due time into the husband of Bella and the son-in-law of Bella's mamma.

There were drawbacks to Mr. Sinclair. I admit the fact on his behalf here, as he

candidly admitted it to "mamma" then. First he was not an earl—"not even a baronet," as a once popular song states—indeed, as the same song proceeds to reason, he was "something much worse:" a man with an office in the City, striving to push his way, and possessed of only enough of this world's goods to support a moderate establishment and a wife.

Like most men, he wanted to marry, for those who say men do not wish to marry if they could only get what they want are most utterly mistaken. In Mr. Sinclair's own rank his experience was large, and he always declared—and declared, I believe, truly—that amongst the young fellows he knew, the wish to settle was the rule, the desire to remain unsettled the exception. But till a man has tried, he would never credit that it is almost as difficult a matter to find a wife as to get rid of one—that is, a suitable wife. Of course, a wife—a vague woman whom he may lead off to his wig-

wam and exalt into his squaw, and make the lawful mother of young braves, who shall throw stones at their neighbours' windows, and torment their neighbours' cats—any one could get for the asking. But a suitable wife, an angel at once material and celestial, who unites in her own person the dream ideal of youth and the more prosaic reality of manhood; who, though his fairy queen, is still a wise and beneficent one; who, though pretty, can add up her house-keeping book; who, though tender and sensitive and sympathising, can yet be strong enough to defy that wile of the devil, "What will people say?" who, though amiable and confiding, can check the tradesmen's accounts, and remonstrate with them on the subject of overcharges; who can be at once the valued housewife and the dear companion at the domestic hearth; where, oh! where shall a young man, or a middle-aged, or an elderly, lay hands on this modern sphinx—where shall

he find a woman both useful and ornamental, or useful without being ornamental, or indeed useful at all?

Country-bred Mr. Sinclair had a horror of marrying a town miss—a creature, as he then imagined her, who believed more in a new bonnet than in Heaven, whose creed was faith unbounded in the necessity of following at the very heels of fashion and wearing unexceptionable clothes, and who only understood the necessity of obeying one commandment, omitted, as she considered, from the original decalogue—

“Thou shalt dress well and expensively, no matter who pays and suffers for it.”

Prejudiced by vivid memories of his mother's old-fashioned gowns and familiar shawls, reminiscences that brought back many a thought of home comfort vanished, of dear soft hands outstretched to greet “her boy,” of eyes full of loving light, now closed till eternity, Mr. Sinclair fell into the common error of forgetting there had

been a time when the old lady he remembered only widowed, and with silvered hair and furrowed cheeks, was a young and pretty girl, and as fond, it may be, of a gay flower and bright ribbon as the most frivolous of her sex.

Time has taught him since those days that well-fitting gloves may cover useful hands, that feet encased in the most ravishing of boots may yet be swift on errands of mercy, that busy tongues may yet have their moments of sympathetic silence, of tender condolence, and that out of very unlikely materials very good wives may occasionally be moulded.

At the period, however, at which Mr. Sinclair and his fortunes are introduced to the reader, Mr. Sinclair considered London "hollow," and its women "make-believes." He was not, above mixing in such few gaieties as the fates sent him invitations for, and he went to parties, and danced, and flirted, and made a little love; but all the

time he never seriously thought of marrying one of the angelic girls with whom he waltzed, or of mating with any but a country maiden—"who will not be above attending to her domestic concerns," he mentally added, "and who will not think every man she sees handsomer and cleverer than her husband;" for Mr. Sinclair did not then know quite enough of female nature to understand that the mere fact of having bestowed her preference upon him, picked him out, so to speak, from the hundreds and thousands she desires the world to believe sought the honour of her heart and hand, makes a woman—that is, a non-exceptional woman—believe her husband to be handsomer and cleverer than the husband of any other of her sex.

But despite the prosaic and depreciating character of his remarks, Mr. Sinclair's was an Arcadian vision not unrelieved by the contemplation of material comforts. For years he had been footless as regarded socks, and buttonless as concerned shirts. He had

drunk flavourless tea, dined off greasy chops, remonstrated in vain on the subject of coffee thick with grounds, and been denied even that best solace of a forlorn bachelor—a glass of something comfortable the last thing at night; because, in the first place, there was no boiling water; and in the next, no water could be boiled because the fire had just been raked out.

The man had worked hard and saved some money, but Comfort was a stranger unto him. Men with large incomes may, no doubt, compel her presence even in apartments; but she had not a smile for Frank Sinclair, who used to return evening after evening to to the same dull rooms where he was wont to read the paper or some new novel, and smoke his pipe till it was time to light his bedroom candle and seek his pillow.

One young fellow whom he knew in those bachelor times slept on fine linen and fared sumptuously every day, because the elderly widow lady to whom the fates sent him



fancied she could trace a likeness between his features and those of some dear departed Thomas, her only child. But then Mr. Frank Sinclair would not have liked landladies of an uncertain age to occupy their leisure in tracing likenesses in his features; and, after all, even muffins nicely buttered, and tea hot and strong and aromatic, could not quite have reconciled him to tender entreaties that he would change his boots immediately, and devout hopes that he went to church regularly twice on Sundays.

He was in lodgings, and by no means happy. He had dreams indeed—waking dreams—of walks through winding lanes across dewy fields. He had visions of an arch, happy face smiling beneath the wealth of wild roses with which he crowned her. He thought of a pretty cottage he knew in the suburbs, where clematis grew round the hall door and honeysuckle climbed up the trellis-work; and pictured to himself, in the dull winter evenings, while he sat alone in

his room, lit only by the fire and two composite candles—while the roar of the London traffic came with a sort of subdued murmur up from the main thoroughfare into the side-street where he lodged—the nest furnished, and the bird he had caught in the country and brought to the town cage he had made pretty for her, sitting with wings complacently folded—his darling, his treasure, his wife.

He did not then know any girl of sweet seventeen whom he wanted to marry, therefore the wicked blue eyes, and the blooming roses, and the merry laugh were all parts and parcels of an illusion which time never realised; and when, his health being somewhat impaired by hard work and little relaxation, he went down, by earnest invitation, to catch trout in the stream which meandered through Mr. St. Clair's meadows, he was as heart-whole as any man need desire.

He was heart-whole, but he wanted a wife and a home; and lo! there were seven in-

ipient wives under the Rectory roof-tree, and the home he beheld there was a happy one ; and, without the necessity for much allurements, he walked straight into the net of the fowler.

In some distant way the St. Clairs and he were connected by blood, but it was a far-away cousin-ship, which had been kept up chiefly because of the kindly feeling that formerly existed between Frank's mother and the Rector of Mulford.

Frank's family had always spelt their name Sinclair, whilst the Rector's father and grandfather had written theirs St. Clair ; but as the St. Clairs pronounced their surname precisely in the same manner as Mr. Sinclair, it does not seem to me that the matter was worth the endless discussion which took place on the subject under the Rectory roof.

It certainly, however, was a blow to Mrs. St. Clair's maternal aspirations, that the first of her daughters should marry not

merely a man who was in trade, but also a man who, with every right to spell his name in an aristocratic manner, refused point-blank to do anything of the kind—indeed, proved so obstinate on the subject that, as Mrs. St. Clair remarked to her husband with a sigh—

“We may as well give it up. He has some old-fashioned prejudice on the subject, and if we press the matter it will only create unpleasantness.”

“I don’t care what he signs himself so long as he is kind to Bella,” answered the Rector, with a catholic sort of Liberalism pleasant to notice in so staunch a Conservative.

“We need not have any fears about that,” said Mrs. St. Clair thoughtfully; “he will be a devoted husband.”

And therein the lady chanced to be right—indeed it was her absolute certainty on that point which reconciled her to trade and future years of commercial warfare.

She was "*so sure*"—that was the way she put it in vocal italics—she was "*so sure*" of Frank Sinclair, she could have forgiven him many a worse crime than that of being partner in a profitable business.

Of course Mrs. St. Clair would have preferred a different husband for her daughter in some respects—as, for instance, had Mr. Clace from Old Park ridden over to lay his lands and money at the feet of one of her girls, she would have preferred him—but still, as mothers get on in life, and girls begin to pass their first youth, both are commonly wise enough to dispense with much romance, and Mrs. St. Clair was honestly glad one of her daughters was about to make a fairly eligible match.

"It is not as if he were a stranger," she remarked to the Honourable Mrs. Clace, "we have known him since he was a boy; and his mother was quite the sweetest creature, and the most perfect gentlewoman I ever met."

“ And then it makes such an opening for the younger girls,” said Mrs. Clace, and thus the feminine talk ran on; the only noticeable thing in the interview being that the two ladies went through an unwonted ceremony at parting, for the Honourable Mrs. Clace proffered the extreme verge of her cheek to Mrs. St. Clair, a piece of condescension to be accounted for only by the fact that marriage, like death, seems to have the remarkable faculty of causing women, for the time at least, to be of one mind.

“ Mrs. Clace was so kind about Bella, dear,” said Mrs. St. Clair subsequently to her husband; “ she spoke so highly of Frank, and wished Bella all happiness, and kissed me at parting:” which was Mrs. St. Clair’s happy way of putting things, since certainly Mrs. Clace had not kissed her—only presented her cheek, as before stated, for the Rector’s wife to touch with her lips if she liked; and, judging by the remark made to Mr. St. Clair, presumably she had

liked—which only proves that in this, as in other matters, there is no accounting for tastes.

Having got so far in advance of my story as to talk of the wedding before the wooing, I must now go back again to the beginning, or at least to the day when Frank Sinclair reached the pretty country station of Mulford-in-the-Weald, where the Rector's old-fashioned phaeton and fat brown pony, driven by Miss Patty St. Clair, the romp of the family, together with two noisy lads, were awaiting his arrival.

## CHAPTER II.

### GOING BACK.

“ARE you cousin Frank?” was the question put to the traveller, while a porter gathered his luggage together.

“I am Frank Sinclair, if he be your cousin,” said the other with a smile.

“All right, then,” cried the boy; “come along! The phaeton, and Patty, and Bob are waiting for you. Pa could not come because he’s got a funeral.”

“An agreeable announcement within two minutes of one’s arrival,” thought Mr. Sinclair, but he held his peace; and by the time he had been a month with these boys,



the ugly word seemed to have lost all its significance to his ear, and he attached just as little meaning to the phrase as did Bob and Charlie, who looked on deaths and burials but as so many inevitable incidents in the routine of their father's profession.

Meanwhile Charlie was shouting to his brother and sister—

“ I've got him ! Here's cousin Frank ! ”

And the rosy-cheeked girl jumped out of the phaeton to greet him ; and Bob, after an imperative order to the pony to “ stand still,” left his head and rushed forward likewise to welcome their visitor.

Then what stowing-away of luggage ensued ! How willingly the porter helped to place the portmanteau, and fishing-tackle, and carpet-bag in the back part of the phaeton, where Patty enjoined the boys not to put their great feet on the leather ! How good-tempered they all were—these cousins of his, whom he had not seen for years ! What stories they told ! what things they

had heard of his doings from their father and mother and elder sisters !

“ When you were a boy did not you do this, and that, and the other, Frank ? ” That was the way they chatted to him, until Patty would playfully threaten them with her whip, and declare pathetically that the house was a perfect Babel when her brothers were at home.

These are trifling details, and yet, as trifles make up most of the happiness or the misery of existence, I am forced to dwell on them, so that you, reader, may understand how it came to pass that Frank Sinclair felt at once so utterly at ease with his relatives. For inside the Rectory his welcome was just as cordial as it had been at the railway station.

“ I am so glad you have come, Frank ! ” said Mrs. St. Clair.

And she put her arms round his neck and kissed him, just as his mother used to do—only it was not quite the same thing, though

it was about the best substitute for the old greeting that he was ever likely to know in this world again—while the Rector said—

“God bless you, my boy! you are the very image of your mother.”

And when Frank stood silent for a moment, unable to answer steadily when he found himself amongst those who had known her so well, they felt they liked him all the better for it, and their hearts were with his heart.

Of all the sunny spots on earth, I think that Rectory was the sunniest. Even in the winter-time it looked bright and pleasant, and now when, after many years, Frank saw it in the golden summer-time, he could not help owning to himself that it was about the sweetest place he had ever seen in all his life.

The rooms were hung with light paper; the bed-chambers were miracles of pink and white drapery; the lower apartments were

always brilliant with flowers; while the garden was full of stocks, and mignonette, and sweet-peas, and convolvuli, and roses, and honeysuckles, and everything pleasant to the sight and grateful to the sense.

The St. Clairs were poor, but theirs was not that griping, hand-to-mouth sort of poverty, which is at once so miserable and so pitiable, and which is not utterly incompatible with even a fairly large income. Theirs was a small income, but it was certain. It was a mere question of cutting the cloth, of buttering the bread; and the cloth was cut to the best advantage, and the butter spread over the greatest possible surface. In marrying his wife, the Reverend Fitzhugh St. Clair had secured two desirable things—a gentlewoman and a capital manager. Wisely she ruled her children, prudently she controlled her household. There was no idleness in that home, no waste in that kitchen; yet there were hours of pleasant relaxation, and there was

no pinching at the table of either servant or master.

The only favouritism, if so it could be called, consisted in this, that when Mr. St. Clair was absent the daintiest morsels were set aside for him ; the tit-bits most likely to tempt the appetite of a weary man were, by one accord, left intact. The sunniest peach, the finest apricot, the sweetest strawberries were all gathered in love and left on his writing-table for him. The very youngest child the Rectory held would have run in with the rosiest-checked apple " for papa, mamma," jubilant at having found the fruit, and satisfied at keeping for its own share some smaller windfall, which to the unspoiled palate tasted just as well as the best in the land.

If there were one in the household who fell into this arrangement grudgingly, and with a certain ungracious assent, it was Bella, the second girl ; but perhaps this might be because, having been a mere

drudge all her later life and taken her tasks unwillingly, she could see no beauty in her mother's loving self-denial, in what Bella sometimes rather bitterly called "the sacrifice of her children to her husband," which Mrs. St. Clair practised.

But the mother was tender, and made all allowance for the child, who had never been quite so amiable as her brothers and sisters. Only once she said to her—

"Bella, dear, if you do not relinquish willingly—if it be not more blessed to you to give than to receive, I would rather that you did not give at all. God loveth a *cheerful* giver, remember; and his creatures do likewise; not one who giveth grudgingly or of necessity."

"But it is so hard, mamma; it is just the same thing day after day, always doing for and considering others, and never oneself."

"The whole of life is the same thing day after day," answered her mother gently. "Think of your father's life. Is there

much variety in it? If he did not find a pleasure in his work he would be most miserable."

"Oh! I do not know about that," said Bella. "He is out and meets people."

"And do you not go out and meet people?" asked Mrs. St. Clair.

"Yes, but it is not the same thing, and you know it, mamma; but you have no sympathy with me."

"My love, it is precisely because I have so much sympathy with you," answered her mother, "that I do not want you to get discontented. If you dislike the work you have to do, leave it, and Patty or Milly shall take your place."

"But you do not wish them to take it."

"No; I have always tried to make my children's young days as happy as I could, so that they might have something pleasant to look back upon in after-life. For years I did all you are doing now myself, so that when you were not at your lessons you

might have thorough holiday. However, we will compromise the matter—Patty shall help you.”

But Bella would not have it. If Patty assisted, Patty might take all the credit. She, Bella, would continue to dust, and make the puddings, and mend the stockings, and her mother should never hear her say another word on the subject. Listening to which resolution Mrs. St. Clair walked away, a little hurt and saddened perhaps, but still not surprised. She understood Bella thoroughly, and knew that when love such as had been lavished upon her failed to make her tender and gentle, nothing but the rough handling of the world would take the taint of selfishness and obstinacy out of her nature.

And so Bella continued to perform those works which she detested; and Frank Sinclair, seeing how utter a drudge she made herself, grew to like and pity her.

Time went by, and Bella changed con-



siderably. She grew brighter, she spoke more cheerfully, she was more amiable, she took a greater pride in her personal appearance, she ceased to snap at the boys, and only blushed when they asked if her ribbon were cousin Frank's favourite colour; if he had not told her over-night that he liked to see myrtle flowers in the hair.

She was not romantic, and yet she had been garnering certain memories while wandering on the river's brink with Frank, that in the after-time were to her heart even as the flowing water, making green where it rippled by.

One afternoon she came in from the summer-house rather late for tea, and instead of going direct to the dining-room, where that usually substantial meal was laid, she went to her own apartment, and asked one of the servants to tell her mother she wanted to speak to her. Whereupon Mrs. St. Clair, much troubled in spirit because she feared this singular request

implied sudden illness, repaired to her daughter's chamber.

"What is the matter, Bella?" asked her mother, as the girl threw her arms about her and burst into tears.

"Oh, mamma, mamma! I want you to forgive me everything I have ever done wrong in my life."

"Bella, you are crazy," said Mrs. St. Clair. "You know I have nothing to forgive, and if I ever had it was forgiven at the time. A mother can retain no other feeling than love for her child."

"But, mamma darling, I am so happy, and I cannot bear to think I have ever made you unhappy. Frank wants to talk to you. He has asked me to marry him, and I said that I thought neither papa nor you would object."

"No, dear; and I pray you and he may be as happy as your father and I have been," and Mrs. St. Clair gathered her daughter to her heart and kissed her tenderly.

And yet the mother was just a little disappointed. She had hoped the first girl who married would marry well; but then she had not expected Bella, the least attractive of her flock, to marry at all. She was ambitious for her children, and yet this was the first at all eligible and tangible offer which had come to one of them. It might not be much, but still it was a first success. What Bismarck felt when he heard of the first victory gained by Prussian arms, Mrs. St. Clair felt when Bella told her Frank had proposed. It was not much possibly; but in settling a family of girls, as in other matters, "it is the first step which costs."

Mrs. St. Clair did not wish to see her daughters governesses, and it was impossible for each one of them to marry an earl; besides which, she liked Frank Sinclair, and was *so sure* he would be good to Bella.

Had she been his adviser she would have counselled him to seek any other of her

children than Bella—even the eldest, Rosina, who detested all household occupations, and devoted herself openly to Beethoven and landscape painting; but, then, he had not asked her advice, and Mrs. St. Clair was honestly glad to think Bella was going to be taken off her hands by a good man.

She would have liked even a barrister better, it is true, not being above the class prejudices of her rank about trade, but still she was glad—honestly glad—to find her least attractive daughter asked in marriage; and she told Frank, with tears in her eyes and a little feminine exaggeration in her sentence, that his proposal and conduct had been “honourable and manly,” and that she should always look upon him as less her son-in-law than her son.

And then Mr. St. Clair gave his consent; and the next day the whole of Mulford had heard the news, and the unanimous opinion of the population proved it be that “Parson’s daughter was uncommon lucky, to be

sure." Consequent upon which Frank was taken all round the parish, and formally introduced to every old woman who had ever received beef-tea or a bottle of wine from those stores which the Rectory held for the use of the sick and feeble only.

## CHAPTER III.

### ON THE BRINK.

THERE could be no doubt that Mr. Sinclair's choice surprised the parishioners of Mulford-in-the-Weald as much as it astonished Mrs. St. Clair herself. The poor are wonderfully sharp-sighted concerning the failings of those who are better off than themselves; they have, as a rule, a wonderful instinct about character; and all the old men and women and young children in Mulford knew, quite as well as did Arabella's mother, that when Frank proposed he had not selected, by any means, the flower of the flock.

Nevertheless, in the genial atmosphere of being engaged—in the delightful occupation of being made love to by Frank, and of carrying him round the village a willing captive tied to her now triumphal car, Bella improved marvellously. It must have been pleasant for one of eleven to feel that she, and she alone, was an object of paramount importance in the eyes of her lover. It was a new sensation to know a person was considering her and her alone, finding his sole enjoyment in loving her—thinking only how he could give her pleasure—and talking, as they walked along, of those happy times to come, when she would have nothing to do except manage her own house, which Frank intended to make a little fairy home for his bride.

As for Frank himself, hundreds of men of his stamp and appearance are to be seen every week day morning between nine and ten o'clock, walking briskly down Oxford Street, or seated on the knife-boards of City omni-

buses—men who dress always well, and often even fashionably—who are a little fastidious about the cut of their coats and the sit of their collars, who are given to flowers in their button-holes, the newest thing in neckties, and sometimes expensive breast-pins—who carry themselves well, who have a good address and a fair knowledge of the world—as the world is in London — and who never show really of what sort of stuff they are actually made until they marry and turn out either good or bad husbands and fathers — either selfish and wasteful, or loving, tender, and patient, unrecorded heroes in the battle of life.

Given a man, accordingly, not bad-looking, who always dressed well, and who was certainly much more gentlemanly in appearance than young Mr. Clace of Old Park, and any girl might have been naturally proud of such a lover—for which reason, and for others previously explained, Bella



was exceedingly proud of Frank Sinclair—proud as well as fond.

Did Frank's glove require that proverbial stitch in time, needle and silk were at once produced. Did Frank think the walk through the winding lane would be the most pleasant, Bella declared that of all routes she should like the winding lane best. Did Frank ask if she should like him to read to her while she was engaged with needle-work, Bella said there was nothing she enjoyed so much as being read to.

And please remember in all this, friends and readers, the girl was no hypocrite. The glamour of happiness was around her, the sunbeams of love fell athwart her path. Have you ever, when the world seems very bright to a child, seen how he will skip along to do your bidding, how he will jump and shout and exult because you have given him some task? and have you ever seen the same child vexed after a scolding, or sulky

because of some disappointment, or dull by reason of illness?

Arrived at to years of discretion, you have, of course, and having looked out over the plains of life, and beheld the ways of the men and women who pass to and fro across them, you understand that adult persons are but "children of a larger growth"—children who in their whims and caprices are not amenable to any human law, who are good-tempered when they feel pleased, and disagreeable when they are displeased, and who can produce an enormous amount of discomfort in life by the indulgence of those "tempers," for which we rebuke a child, but which we are compelled to endure at the hands of the wife of our bosom, the rich relative from whom we have expectations, the principal who pays our salary, and the valued servant whom we cannot exactly afford to discharge.

Bella St. Clair—to cut the analogy short—was very happy and very pleasant in those

bright sunshiny days when Frank asked her hand in marriage, and she made herself agreeable accordingly; whilst for him, he was the most devoted lover imaginable. Following the ancient and barbaric fashion, he gave her presents innumerable—brooches, and rings, and chains, and bracelets followed in quick succession—in such quick succession, indeed, that Mrs. St. Clair had to raise her maternal voice in earnest expostulation.

To a man who has all his life spent little on himself, there is an exquisite pleasure in spending on others, more especially when those others have not been accustomed to be so considered, and accordingly Frank Sinclair was “generosity itself”—so Mrs. St. Clair said—towards Bella and her family.

As for Patty, she declared she “grudged him to her sister—he was such a dear,” and indeed there were many older persons than Patty who considered that in selecting Bella he had chosen neither wisely nor well.

But then these selections are inscrutable, and Mr. Sinclair had chosen and was engaged, and meant very shortly to be married.

There was no one to oppose his wishes in this matter. Both the Rector and his wife disapproved of long engagements. After the protracted holiday he had taken, Frank knew quite well his partner would not agree to frequent absences for the future, even though he pleaded in justification that he desired to see his lady love ; further, he had no consents to ask, no friends to consult, no settlements to draw. As Eve came to Adam, (only with a rather better wardrobe) Bella was coming to him, utterly 'dowerless, whilst on his side he had nothing to make over to her. His money was all in his business, and even had he desired to do so, he could not have withdrawn any portion of it—wherefore the whole affair proved as utterly Arcadian as can well be imagined. After the first general and necessary statement of his affairs in Mr. St. Clair's library,

the question of ways and means was never mentioned, save between Frank and his *fiancée*, and then only in that imaginative and unpractical manner which obtains amongst lovers, when they sit down like children to tell fairy stories to each other, or to build castles destined never to be inhabited, even by themselves.

It was Mrs. St. Clair who first mooted the idea of the newly-married pair going for a time into lodgings, and on that occasion she made a remark which surprised Frank not a little.

“Bella does not know much about management,” she hinted, “and it might be quite as well for her not to begin with a house of her own. But, of course, you know best what will be most conducive to your happiness.”

“Why, I thought all your daughters were incomparable managers!” exclaimed Mr. Sinclair. “Indeed, how could they be otherwise?”

"When they have such a mother," finished Mrs. St. Clair, laughing. "Why, that is precisely the reason for which I should like Bella not to take too high a flight at first. I have managed for them, and they have worked, how well you know, under me—but still there is a difference, which I could perhaps scarcely make you understand."

"Yes, I do understand," he replied. "They have been, after a fashion, clerks, and you principal."

"Precisely so," Mrs. St. Clair said, and Frank went away, a little thoughtful, to sound Bella on the subject; for although lodgings might prove more economical, still the most imaginative individual could scarcely, out of a "genteelly furnished first floor, with attendance," have even mentally realised the visionary home of this man's constant dreams.

He was quite willing to put up with some inconveniences, in order to have a home of which he could lock the front door at night

and consider himself master. Rent and taxes, butcher and baker, cook and housemaid had no horrors for him, and he ignorantly imagined that every woman liked to have a house of which she could feel herself mistress, which she might be at full liberty to explore from garret to cellar at her own sweet will.

For hours he and Bella had sat discoursing concerning the colour most desirable for their drawing-room curtains—whether the dining-room furniture should be oak or maple; and he therefore felt little doubt that the idea of “apartments” would prove as distasteful to her as it had done to him, for which reason he went away and told her just what Mrs. St. Clair had suggested, confident that his charmer would at once say—

“No, dear Frank, please do let us have a house of our own—if it have but four rooms.”

To his disappointment, however, his

charmer said nothing of the kind. She remained silent for a minute, and then remarked—

“I am not sure but that mamma is right. I do know very little about housekeeping, and I certainly should prefer not being troubled with servants, and all that sort of thing, at first. I want to enjoy myself for a time—that is, if I may.”

“Of course you may,” he answered; “it shall be all just as you wish,” and he hoped she did not notice the disappointment he could scarcely conceal. “After all it is only natural,” he thought, “and soon she will get as weary of being homeless as I am;” but still the disappointment remained—the nest his fancy had built was never to be tenanted by the sweet hopes of early married life, by the tender memories of the time when man and wife are scarcely more than lover and betrothed, when all the road they are to walk together is before them, and they set out hand-in-hand to wander amongst the roses that precede the briars.



“Perhaps it *is* better,” he said to Mrs. St. Clair a few days afterwards; “when Bella has seen the London sights and got tired of lodgings, we can then choose the furniture together.”

“You are a dear, good fellow,” answered the lady, laying her hand on his, and to his surprise Frank saw that her eyes were full of tears; for he never dreamed she liked him so much that she would rather have seen him choose any of her children than Bella.

“I hope and trust she will make him a loving wife,” she said, over and over again; and her husband, who, unaccustomed to such unusual interruptions, and irritated, perhaps, by doubts which seemed to him unreasonable, and an anxiety which was, to say the least, premature, looked up from the sermon that had been engaging his attention, and answered—

“Pooh! my dear, the girl will be quite loving enough. Why, she cannot bear him out of her sight!”

"True; but they are not married yet," Mrs. St. Clair replied.

"They very soon will be, at any rate," returned the Rector, who felt that his grief would not be overpowering when all the fuss was over.

"Yes, and then we shall see," remarked the mother—which only went to prove she knew enough of the world to be aware that the fair creature who mends gloves for her lover one month, may be averse to sewing on a button for her husband the next, and that the doting bridegroom who will not suffer his wife to pick up even a glove for herself, may before the honeymoon have passed behold with unmoved stoicism his bride, utterly unassisted, wheel an arm-chair forward to the fire.

Lovers ascend to a seventh heaven of rapture and civility, but ultimately they must return to earth; and it depends a good deal on the tempers they bring back with them to the old prosaic business of existence,

what sort of an affair existence will prove—whether snowy or sunshiny, prosperous or the reverse.

Mrs. St. Clair evidently thought there might be some rough weather on the voyage ; but then mothers are not invariably the best judges of their children's characters, and Bella declared Patty was her parents' favourite. "And I do not think parents ought to have favourites amongst their children," she finished, an opinion in which Frank entirely agreed, for the very simple reason that in those days he had not the remotest idea how parents feel towards their children, and did not know how impossible it is for the even balance of love to be held between Hope and Grace—between Alfred and Harry.

But the time was coming when he was to know all about that, and a few other things, the advent of which he could not very well have foreseen when he walked with Bella along the winding lanes, and across the pleasant fields, of Mulford-in-the-Weald.

## CHAPTER IV.

“ TO HAVE AND TO HOLD.”

It was the day of the wedding, and every member of the St. Clair family had, when he or she opened his or her eyes, opened likewise his or her mouth, in order to ask—

“ What sort of a morning is it ? ”

“ Oh ! lovely,” other mouths answered, and then there ensued a great stir and bustle in the Rectory, for it was not every day that seven sisters put on new dresses at once, and a little excitement was natural, considering the unwonted nature of the ceremony.

No human being, who was acquainted with the Rectory, in its pristine state, could

have recognised the place as it appeared on the morning in question.

In lieu of pens, and ink, and paper, and books, and manuscripts, the library-table was covered with glasses, plates, bottles, dishes, and all sorts of edibles ready to replenish the feast spread in the dining-room — where half the parish had already come to see the wedding breakfast laid out—which the old women pronounced to be “beautiful, beautiful, sure-ly.”

And certainly the arrangement was tasteful and pretty in the extreme. Baskets, edged with ferns, contained the pale pink roses of autumn, the rich berries of the barberry, the bright scarlet clusters of the mountain ash, and all late-blooming flowers that the Rectory garden could furnish; whilst, flanking on each side the wedding cake, were china vases filled with rare and beautiful exotics that had been furnished from the gardens of Sir Arthur Landless and the honourable Mrs. Clace. As for the draw-

ing-room, Mrs. Clace had sent plants enough to convert it into a perfect bower, where were enshrined the wedding presents, which, when inspected, turned out to be as unmeaning and as useless as wedding presents usually are amongst those whom, for want of a better phrase, one is compelled to term the upper middle-class.

The half-dozen teaspoons, the cut-glass decanters with wine-glasses to match, the electro-plated tea service, the butter-dish, and two vases for the mantel-shelf, so familiar to memory as furnishing some of the bridal gifts of a different rank, were conspicuous from their absence; and in their place appeared a Church Service, an article with which, it might have been presumed, a clergyman's daughter was already furnished; a gold thimble that looked exceedingly like brass, the gift of Miss Landless; a Lady's Companion; a sofa pillow, embroidered by the fair fingers of Miss Clace; a workbox, "with Patty's love;" a framed

water-colour drawing of the Rectory, “from Rosina”; an inlaid writing-desk, containing a note asking Bella’s acceptance of the same, from “her affectionate little brothers and sisters;” a cedar-wood glove-box, contributed by Sir Arthur Landless, who had brought it with him from India many years previously; a handsomely bound edition of ‘*Proverbial Philosophy*,’ in which appeared Mrs. Clace’s own autograph; a chess-board; a paper knife; a Parian ink-stand, admirably adapted, of course, for the purpose for which it was intended; ‘*Lalla Rookh*,’ in green and gold; a card-basket; a papier-mâché blotting case; a bog-oak Irish cross; a diamond ring, which Mrs. St. Clair had reset for the occasion; a pair of ear-rings, once the property of Mr. St. Clair’s mother; and, from the bridegroom, the sweetest gold chain and the darlingest little watch (so said the young ladies) that were ever beheld.

If in the foregoing catalogue any likely or usual article has been omitted, the reader

may be quite certain it nevertheless formed part of the collection, for all Bella's friends and acquaintances had vied with one another in doing honour to the occasion; even the school-children presented her with half-a-dozen anti-macassars, while the granddaughter of a rheumatic old parishioner sent up a pair of crochet watch-pockets, "with her duty;" and a young man, who as a lad had enjoyed the advantage of having repeated his Catechism to Miss Bella, brought her, the evening before the wedding, a fan large enough to have served for a parasol, composed of white feathers, and trimmed with the eyes from a peacock's tail, which fan he had, together with other curiosities, brought with him from foreign parts.

Altogether, indeed, the Rectory wore an unwonted air of excitement—not to say dissipation—which might well be, considering a girl was going out of it that very morning to be married, accompanied by no



less than eight bridesmaids, all arrayed in sky-blue dresses.

From the glass door at the back of the hall which led into a shrubby path, that in turn conducted to a gate affording ingress to the village graveyard, red cloth was laid to the very church-door.

Provision had indeed, been made for rain, in the shape of two carriages—one belonging to Mrs. Clace, and the other to Sir Arthur Landless; but it was felt by the St. Clairs that a walking wedding was most suitable under the circumstances, and a very pretty sight it was to see the bridal party pass along the path, lined with school-children and the parishioners, each one of whom Bella knew so well.

Before them in the church were Mr. Sinclair and his best man. The group was soon arranged, and it was then the Honourable Mrs. Clace surveyed the bride and bridegroom through her double eye-glasses, and Sir Arthur gave the bride away, and the

Reverend Fitzhugh St. Clair, assisted by the Dean of Ringleton, performed that ceremony which converted Miss Arabella Constance Marion St. Clair into Frank Sinclair's wife ; all of which facts have been duly recorded in the first paragraph of this story.

Altogether it was a very happy wedding and wedding breakfast ; and when after the breakfast and changing her dress, Bella came down to go out into the world and commence her new life, Frank, seeing how she wept at bidding farewell to her friends, how she stopped on her way to the carriage to shake hands with this old parishioner and that favourite school-child, felt he had indeed secured a treasure, and thanked God for the blessing vouchsafed.

"My darling," he said, as they drove off, "do not fret so much : we must have them all to stay with us."

"Oh ! Frank, you are so good," Bella answered.

"Who could help being good to you ?" he replied.

And then Bella laughed through her tears, and said, "Many people:" and so their courtship ended, and their married life began.

Meanwhile, at the Rectory, the festivities were continued throughout the day, for the poorer parishioners had been invited to partake, at five o'clock, of a feast consisting of strong tea well-sugared, and immense slices of cake, which were duly dispensed and distributed by the bridesmaids, the groomsmen, the boys, and such of the wedding guests as kindly remained for the purpose.

Amongst the latter was young Mr. Clace, just returned from college, who, disregarding his mother's signs, and nods, and hints, persisted in staying behind, captivated clearly by Patty's pretty face, and Patty's natural manners.

"Now, Harry, remember, I will have no nonsense, I will never have anything of the sort!" said the somewhat arbitrary lady, when her son handed her to her carriage,

after promising to return to Old Park in time for dinner.

"Surely, mother," he answered "it will be time enough for you to withhold your consent when I ask it," which caused Mrs. Clace inwardly to wish that clergymen were forbidden by law to marry, or, at least, to have marriageable daughters.

"Oh, dear!" said Mrs. St. Clair, as she laid her head on her pillow that night; "I am so thankful it is all over; and I hope and trust they will be happy!"

"The proof of the pudding is in the eating," answered Mr. St. Clair, philosophically, for he was sleepy, and unaccustomed as he was to wine, champagne had caused him to take more cheerful views of life than those in which his better-half seemed disposed to indulge.

"Yes, and what I want to know," said Mrs. St. Clair, "is how it is going to eat."

"I cannot imagine why you think they are going to be wretched," Mr. St. Clair

roused himself sufficiently to remark ; " it seems to me they have every reasonable chance of happiness."

And, indeed, as time went by, it appeared as if the Rector were right, and his wife wrong. Letters arrived from both bride and bridegroom—happy, pleasant letters, which it rejoiced the mother's heart to receive—letters written during the honeymoon, and after their return to London ; filled first with descriptions of foreign travel, and subsequently with accounts of the wonders of London.

" Frank is coming home early to take me out," so the text of most of these epistles ran ; " we went last night to the Olympic ; we are going next week to Drury Lane. Frank wants to know when you can spare one of the girls to come up. He fancies I must be often lonely when he is away, and, indeed, dear mamma, I do miss you all dreadfully. Could not Patty spend the winter with us ? Frank would be delighted !" Which was

indeed true, for already Frank found it might not be always possible for him to return home early, in order to take his wife out ; whilst, on the other hand, he knew she must often lack occupation, and amusement, and companionship in his absence.

“ When we have a house of our own, she will find plenty to do,” he considered, and meantime he was honestly glad to hear that Mrs. St. Clair intended to let Patty come.

“ She will be out of the way of young Clace,” explained Mrs. St. Clair to her husband—for since the day of the wedding Mr. Clace’s visits had grown frequent, and those of Mrs. Clace infrequent—“ and I do not want any child of mine to marry into a family where she would not be properly received,” finished the lady, with a proper spirit, to which the Rector replied—

“ You may be very sure she never would be welcome at Old Park, so you had better send her for a couple of months to Bella.”

Accordingly Patty went to London, but

returned at the expiration of six weeks on the plea of ill-health, strangely silent concerning her visit.

"Did you not enjoy your visit, Patty?" asked her mother, marvelling both at her changed face and her singular reticence.

"Oh! London is a wonderful place," Patty answered; "and Bella wished me to see everything, and Frank was very kind about taking me out, but I got tired of it, mamma. After all, London is not like the country, and Bella's house is not like home; but that is not her fault, for how can any lodgings be like one's own home? I do hope if ever I marry I shall have some quiet little cottage in the country."

"I hope, love, you have never wished to be at Old Park," said her mother gently.

"No, indeed, mamma. Mr. Clace called at Frank's while I was in London, and I told him it could not be, even if I cared for him, which I did not; and I hope you and papa will not be vexed with me for refusing him."

"My dear, I would not have had you accept him for any consideration."

"Well, I thought you would not, after the way Mrs. Clace has behaved towards us all ever since Bella's marriage; but Bella used to scold me about it, and yet I do not think she liked his asking me. Latterly she was always cross and irritable, more especially when Frank's partner began calling in the evenings. She used to be pleasant enough before him, but the next day she would say I flirted, and ask me how many more lovers I wanted; and then I sometimes grew cross, and altogether I thought it better to come home."

"Patty," said her mother, "I do not wish you to go into a house, and then talk about what happens in it; but I should just like to know if Bella and Frank are happy."

"I think so," Patty answered; "but it is only because Frank has the temper of an angel. If I were a man," she added



vehemently, "and married to Bella, I would not endure her nasty temper and discontented ways for five minutes—that I would not!"

Which must have proved very consolatory to Mrs. St. Clair.

## CHAPTER V.

### AFTER YEARS.

It takes a man or woman a long time to acknowledge that he or she has matrimonially made a mistake—mentally, I mean; since no person who is not a simple idiot, or who is not seeking to deceive him or her self in the pursuit of an unlawful attachment, will ever make such an acknowledgment otherwise—and thus it chanced that many a year passed away before Frank Sinclair fairly and fully acknowledged, in the depths of his own heart, that the Bella who had now the making or marring of his happiness was not

exactly the Bella he had idealised to himself in the sunshiny days at Mulford.

At first, when he found his wife peevish and discontented, resentful concerning his slightest shortcoming, blind to the personal sacrifices he made in order that she might be happy, he framed excuses for her—as loving men and women will frame excuses for those dear to them, till all their patience and most part of their affection is exhausted.

Much sooner than women perhaps—because they more fully understand this wicked world and the ways thereof—men grasp the fact that the only real friends they are ever likely to possess are those of their own household; and Frank Sinclair, who longed with an intense yearning for utter sympathy, and entire one-mindedness between himself and his wife, left no stone unturned to try and bring about a perfect understanding.

There was nothing in the earlier days of

his married life that he did not confide to her; his hopes, his fears, his anxieties, his successes; but when, as time went by, he found that the things which perforce interested him were considered tiresome by his wife, he gradually curtailed his confidences, and ended, as so many husbands do, by closing his lips concerning business when he locked his office door.

And yet the pair were happy enough—very happy, perhaps, as times and wedded experience go; but the reason for this happiness certainly was that Frank had—as Patty expressed it—the temper of an angel, which caused him to try to make excuses when there were actually none to be found, and to meet selfishness and irritability with that soft answer which, if it did not exactly in his case turn away wrath, prevented an unseemly exhibition of it.

They had long left the “comfortably furnished apartments”—where, as Bella said, “it was so horrid to sit all alone from

morning till night"—and taken up their abode in a house, which was a very good house of its kind, though certainly as distant from Frank's ideal of a home as Bella proved to be from his ideal of a wife; but still, people who have any contentment in their natures learn to be satisfied in time with what they can get; and in lieu of roses and honeysuckle, of a modest cottage and homely rooms, Frank accepted a stuccoed dwelling in a pretentious terrace, with a long strip of garden ground at the back and a short strip of garden ground at the front.

It was a long way from his business—so long, indeed, as to necessitate a weary journey morning and evening; but then, as Bella truly said, when the question of locality was first mooted, "We ought to live in some place where our friends can come to see us"—meaning that if any unfashionable suburb were selected, it was not to be expected that those notables of

Mulford-in-the-Weald, who spent the season in London, would call once during its continuance on Mrs. Sinclair.

There was a certain amount of reason in this observation, and Frank acknowledged it. A time comes in all married lives when the man and the woman have for many hours in each day to seek their occupations and amusements separately, and certainly Mr. Sinclair had no desire that his wife should live in entire seclusion, or that she should be debarred in any way from the social advantages to which she was clearly entitled by virtue of Sir Arthur Landless and the Dean of Ringleton.

But still, admitting all this, he thought there was no necessity for her to have based the argument upon the entirely supposititious statement that he had his friends in the City, and plenty of excitement to amuse and interest him.

"I do not know much about the amusement, dear," he answered; "the happiest

hour of my life is when I leave the office and turn my face homeward."

To which Bella replied, with a certain gratification in her tone, despite the ungraciousness of her words, "Men always say that."

"And mean it too, very often, I hope," added her husband; "at least, I can speak for myself; whatever else you may doubt in the future, never doubt my love for home and you."

His tone was earnest—so earnest, indeed, that Bella, remembering the days of their sweet love-making, rose, and, brushing the hair back from his forehead, kissed him more affectionately than was her wont.

"I never have doubted it," she said, "and I never shall."

And so the twilight deepened, and the husband and wife sat silent, hand locked in hand.

Nevertheless, Bella Sinclair was not one to believe very implicitly in anything ex-

cepting herself, and she had never yet breasted any trouble high enough and strong enough to shake her confidence in her own infallibility.

To a different man she might have made, perhaps, a different wife; but if devotion and unselfishness cannot win both in return, what are we to think of our humanity? And when the evil days came and division ensued, it was the thought of all Frank's love, of all his unappreciated tenderness, that touched the woman's heart and pricked the woman's conscience, and brought such peace to the household as it had never before known.

So long as he is prosperous, a man's domestic gods may be propitiated. These gods are fond of votive offerings, they like the worshipper who returns with his hands full of the spoils of the enemy; but once let the tide of battle turn, once let the man, hunted and exhausted, run into the sanctuary for comfort and rest, and the



domestic gods, as a rule, fail, and the vanquished finds he has been worshipping all the time vain idols, who have no power of consolation in the hour of need !

For years worldly matters went smoothly enough with the Sinclairs ; true, Frank thought his wife might have managed better on the allowance he made for house-keeping ; but he was not a man to brew misery out of pence, or even pounds, and so he never worried Bella's soul with complaints concerning underdone mutton or weak tea.

He honestly believed she did her best for him, and if the best was bad, why, he knew it was all he was ever likely to get. Women are not to blame because Heaven has not made them clever housekeepers, any more than men are to blame because they cannot act, or sing, or paint.

For my own part, I believe it requires just as much true genius to manage a household properly as to take the command of an

army. The strategical part is, of course, rarely required, save when arranging the rival pretensions of nurse and cook, house-keeper and lady's-maid ; but the organisation is precisely similar. Bella Sinclair, however, did not organise ; she spent—and spent uselessly—and Frank perforce had to be satisfied.

The man's first real pecuniary trial came about in this wise :—

His partner—his senior partner, remember—who had exhibited a little *tendresse* for Patty, which attachment Bella nipped in the bud, married, and from that hour there was greater dissatisfaction than ever in Briant View Terrace ; and the result produced by the dissatisfaction will be best explained by a conversation which took place some four years subsequently in the City office.

“Sinclair,” said his partner, Mr. Varham, one afternoon, when the clerks had gone and the managing man was putting on his top-

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coat, "if you are not in a hurry I should like to speak to you for five minutes."

Whereupon, greatly wondering, Frank repaired to his senior's private office.

"We have worked together for a good many years," began Mr. Varham, after closing the door, "and we have never, so far as I remember, disagreed during the time; *but* I think it better we should now dissolve partnership, and I want to know how it shall be—shall I leave or you?"

"What have I done? what have I left undone?" Frank gasped, for he had not been prepared for this blow, and it took away his breath.

"You have done nothing, left nothing undone," answered Mr. Varham; "but we had better separate. I suppose I may speak freely to you, and say our wives cannot stable their horses together, and never will. Your wife thinks we have too much out of the concern; my wife thinks your wife has no right to inquire into her pin-money, since

she had a fortune of her own. Now, you understand, all this has nothing to do with you and me individually, only we must separate. I cannot stand the home indignation ; you, possibly, go through the same business. For myself, I cannot see what legislation could do in such a matter, and at all events, for the present legislation has not attempted to interfere. Parliament cannot forbid marriage ; it cannot ordain that one's wife shall live two hundred miles away from her husband's office, and even if it could, she would still know the price per yard another woman paid for her dress. I am not blaming you, remember, or Mrs. Sinclair, or Mrs. Varham ; all I say is, my life shall not be made a burden to me by reason of women's quarrels. So, now, how is it to be ? Will you leave, or shall I ? Will you take a sum, or give a sum ? ”

At which direct question Frank stood aghast. He could not contradict the truth of a single word his partner said, and yet

until that moment, as he told him, a thought of their parting company had never crossed his mind.

"But, then, you are long-suffering," remarked Mr. Varham, "and I am not."

"I am not aware that I have anything to suffer," said Frank, a little stiffly, although at the moment memory recalled many a *mauvais quart d'heure* he had endured, hearkening to how "those Varhams are robbing you!"

"I did not say that you had to suffer, but I have," retorted Mr. Varham, who, believing his wife could do no wrong, had no objection to making himself out a martyr. "I have suffered for a long time in fact; I have waited in hopes of things mending; but things do not mend, and as our children grow older matters will get worse. There will be jealousies and heart-burnings, and Heaven knows what, between our woman-kind; so now, Sinclair, without any ill-will

or disagreeable feeling, let us face the difficulty and see what is best to be done."

"I would not for anything it should ever have come to this," said Frank vehemently. "Think of the years we have worked together!"

"Ay, my boy; but we have taken to ourselves wives, and that makes all the difference. It is natural for us to marry, and it is natural for the ladies—God bless them!—to quarrel. Shall we interfere with the arrangements of Nature? Heaven forefend! So now, Sinclair, we have arrived at a point where our roads must diverge; shall it be you to branch off, or shall it be myself?" and Mr. Varham leaned back in his chair, and put one leg across the other, and looked at Mr. Sinclair not without a certain embarrassment as he spoke.

"You are the senior," Frank answered, "and it should therefore be for you to state your wishes."

"I have none," was the reply. "I can

go, or I can stay ; I will pay you out, or be paid out, making the terms as easy for you as I can. My wife, as you are aware, has some private means and very rich relations, so it shall be just as you like. Either you stay and I go, or I stay and you go, without prejudice ; that is to say, each having as high an opinion of the other as formerly—higher, perhaps.”

“Is it unavoidable?” Frank asked, after the manner of one who gropes about to find some help he is unable to grasp.

“Quite, and I am sorry for it,” Mr. Varham answered.

And then the pair shook hands.

Which was the best for him to accept?—All the way to Kensington Mr. Sinclair debated this question. Should he give or take, buy or sell? He would have liked to ask his wife, but he knew she could not refrain from digressing into tirades concerning the expensiveness of Mrs. Varham’s dress, the luxuriousness of Mrs. Varham’s habits.

"Never rises till noon," was one of Bella's accusations.

"But, my dear," suggested Frank "you are not generally down for breakfast."

"She has only one boy," urged Bella.

"As years go by she will probably have more," Frank was wont to answer; and this was just one of those conversations he felt he could not in his then mood endure with equanimity.



## CHAPTER VI.

### COMING STRUGGLES.

THERE are some persons whose ordinary talk has just the same effect upon a mental wound that a medical plaster has upon a physical. It keeps the place raw, it irritates beyond all reason. A man shrinks from it as he might from a charge of cavalry or discharge of musketry. Since, look you, men can endure the cannon's mouth sometimes better than a woman's tongue.

Frank Sinclair could, at all events, and for this reason he said nothing to his wife concerning Mr. Varham's proposition; but lay awake all night, considering which path he had better decide to take.

If he took the one he should, to be sure, have a certain sum of money ; but, then, it would be needful for him almost to commence again to rear a business edifice thereupon. A man, if he have a certain family of four, and an uncertain family of fourteen possibly to follow, cannot easily afford to sit down for life on a small fixed income ; and Mr. Sinclair knew quite well that if he let himself be paid out, he should have at once to find some other commercial investment for his money likely to yield a large percentage.

Looking at the matter from a different point of view, if he paid out Mr. Varham he should for a long time find himself, pecuniarily, most seriously crippled ; and yet, after much thought and deliberation, this was the course he decided to adopt. Not for one instant did he contemplate taking in another partner ; better any harass in the City, welcome any struggle rather than the trouble of hearing his wife's complaints of

unfairness, of listening to her recital of petty annoyances—of petty feminine jealousies.

No; he would pay as much as he could, and borrow as much as possible, and owe as much as Mr. Varham could conveniently allow. It was a mere question of time and work, he comforted himself by saying. The business was a good business, and in time, no doubt, it would all turn out for the best. And so the affair was concluded, and the partnership hitherto subsisting between Alfred Varham and Francis Sinclair was dissolved, by mutual consent, and duly gazetted.

“I am so thankful!” exclaimed Mrs. Sinclair, when she heard of it. “Now you will be able to keep what you make for yourself.”

“I shall not be one sixpence better off, probably, for years,” answered Frank, a little bitterly, “and shall have to work twice as hard.”

“Oh, that is all nonsense!” remarked Mrs. Sinclair. “I do not believe Mr. Varham ever did any work.”

“My dear, you were not at the office to know,” Frank mildly expostulated.

“No, but I am quite certain of it, notwithstanding,” was the peculiarly feminine, and therefore utterly unanswerable, reply.

From that time Frank Sinclair's troubles commenced ; but they gathered about him slowly. It was not any one great loss, or any particular panic, that made him a poor man ; but the constant drag of interest to pay, of larger salaries to give, of more work to do, that made his life about that period one long anxiety.

Never before in his memory had everything rested entirely on his own shoulders, depended altogether on his own health and exertions. As a very young man he had, indeed, assisted his mother's modest income ; but she was not wholly dependent upon him, as the pregnant hampers, laden with good things, that arrived from her little cottage, and gladdened the hearts of those landladies who kindly took charge of their contents

for Frank—levying large tolls by the way—went to testify. After her death he had no one to be anxious for. He worked himself into a partnership in a moderately successful business, where an older and more experienced man took the principal lead, and whilst he and Mr. Varham continued together he had never really known the actual meaning of an hour's uneasiness.

Now the case was altogether different: with an increasing family, a wife who seemed to grow daily less and less capable of making the best of their means, and an establishment the expenses of which were certainly rather beyond than within his means, he soon found anxieties for the present and the future crowding into his City office, following him through the streets, mounting with him to the knife-boards of West-end omnibuses, and rousing him at night from the sleep he so much needed after the labours and troubles of the day.

Frank Sinclair grew older visibly, and

more irritable certainly. For his temper was angelic no longer. Even Patty—still unmarried—who came at rare intervals to pass a few days with them, could not help noticing that, and the reason for the change was not, perhaps, far to seek.

He had an anxious time of it in the City, and when he returned at night it was to a miserable, untidy home, "where there is never a comfortable meal ready for him, mamma," Patty declared. "Bella says he is so uncertain in his time that it is of no use having anything prepared. I assure you, one day when Bella was off visiting some new friends she has made (horrid people, I call them) I got the cook to have late dinner—a nice little dinner—and Frank seemed quite surprised and grateful. I spoke to Bella about the way she neglects him and her children, and we quarrelled, and I never intend to enter her doors again."

"My dear Patty," expostulated her mother, "you cannot wonder at Bella's resenting your interference."

“Well, it would be impossible for me to be there and not interfere,” Patty retorted. “She has got into a clique who seem to believe all men are little better than either monsters or fools. I do not really, stupid as Bella is, think she would be so bad if it were not for the set of people she has about her. I am sure it used to go to my very heart to see Frank come home tired and jaded at night, and Bella generally off to some party; and whether she was at home or not, nothing comfortable or pleasant. As for the children—and darlings they are, the very sweetest pets I ever beheld—she takes no pride in them at all: their dresses are torn, and they have no nice, pretty clothes; and if it were not for their nurse, who is only a girl, I believe they would never be washed, for Bella is far above looking after her children. I used to mend their things till I saw she did not like it; and, oh! mamma, it is completely wretched. I cannot think how Frank bears it even as he

does. I am sure I should leave her. There, I never saw such a house! Often when I was in London I thought about the evening before she was married, when she collected all the unmended stockings and piled them in her basket, and put the lid on, and said, 'I have done with you, and I hope I shall never have to darn another pair.' And I do not believe she has. I think she wears them till they will hold together no longer, and then buys new."

"Did Bella say so?" asked Mrs. St. Clair.

"Yes, indeed. I thought I told you at the time."

"No," her mother answered; "and I wish you had not told me now."

And she turned away with tears in her eyes, sick at heart to find how much stronger, in some persons, nature is than training, selfishness than duty.



## CHAPTER VII.

### FRANK'S RESOLVE.

ONE summer's evening, ten years after his marriage, Frank Sinclair left his office with the intention of walking home. It was pleasantly cool after the heat of the day, and as he had scarcely moved from his desk since early in the morning when he came into the City, the prospect of a walk, even through familiar thoroughfares, between endless rows of houses, seemed pleasant to him.

No person who has not been in a struggling business, can imagine the relief of mind it is to a man to feel that even for one hour the pressure is relaxed, that toward

to-morrow he need not look forward with dread ; and after years of anxiety, after days and nights of hard thought and painful work, Frank Sinclair was able at last to say, "The battle is over, and I have won."

For the battle was over, and the fight won so far as this, that in pecuniary matters he was the day forward instead of the day behind ; that he had the typical five-pound note in hand without which no City man can be pronounced happy ; that he was, still to speak allegorically, able to hatch his chickens before going through the process of counting them. Consequently, so far as a tranquil mind concerning business could tend to make him happy, Frank Sinclair might that summer's evening have been so called.

But he had other and nearer causes for anxiety than any mere pecuniary affair ; and now that the strain of business pressure was relaxed, that the entangled skein of commercial matters had been made compara-

tively smooth, the man could not help thinking about home and home sorrows ; about his wife who was no helpmate ; about his children who were neglected ; about his house which was wretched ; about domestic extravagance which had added in no small degree to increase the troubles he had been daily called upon to endure, in that modern pandemonium where men pant out their lives and peril their souls, not for wealth, not even for competence, but just for the sake of a mere subsistence, the bread of which is bitter to the palate, and the waters whereof are briny to the taste.

It takes a man or woman a long time to confess that he or she has made just that one mistake which is utterly irrevocable. Old recollections, the fond memories of tender words whispered when the dusty roads of life were still untraversed, when it was all greensward under-foot, and blossoming roses over-head ; the very dread, it may be, of the thought of the way still to be

traversed with an uncongenial companion : all these things conspire to induce human beings to make the best of their bargain, and to lay the fault of domestic unhappiness, as long as possible, on any cause save that of utter unsuitability.

Frank Sinclair had striven to do this, at any rate, and even as he walked home that evening he made excuses for the woman who was his wife, and vowed, if it lay in his power to make a better thing of the future, the future should be better than the past had proved.

Only, how was he to set about it? Between them there had grown up insensibly a barrier, strong in precise proportion as it was indescribable.

Arabella had indeed, as Patty stated, fallen amongst people whose friendship (save the mark !) and sympathy (that a good word should ever come to be so misapplied !) were effecting infinite harm.

These were persons who, never having

done a day's real work in their lives, had no faith in the real work of others; who, just as every man thinks he can drive a gig through London, believed there was nothing difficult in conducting a business; who had a general contempt for men, their uselessness, their selfishness, their exacting ideas. Even the males amongst that clique had a way of saying, "If you want a thing done well, get a woman to do it," whilst all the time the women did nothing except complain about the shortcomings of the rival sex.

Those were the days before "Women's Rights" was discussed either privately or publicly. "Women's Wrongs," a much more prolific and dangerous subject, was then the popular question in certain circles. Ladies who were married, and ladies who were single, alike agreed in condemning the arrangements of Providence as regarded mankind.

People may object to the institution of women's rights, and the open discussion of

their fitness for this or that trade and profession, but there can be no question that an open sore is better than one falsely healed; and that if women think themselves unfairly treated, it is better they should say so in the market-place than beside the domestic hearth; that the question should be decided by the experience of the world, rather than sulked over between husband and wife, father and daughter.

If it give the smallest pleasure to a gentlewoman to go out and earn her own bread instead of letting some one more competent earn it for her, there cannot, I apprehend, be any reason why she should be prevented from doing so. England is a free country, which means that we reside in a land where one human being has full liberty to annoy another to his heart's content, and why should woman be an exception to this rule? The times in which a father could exercise a certain control over his son's career have had their day, and are gone; and if modern

daughters develop a taste for "cutting their own grass," to use an inelegant but expressive phrase, paterfamilias may be quite certain it is much more to his interest they should do so, than sit at home in that fearful state of idleness which obtains in modern English homes—thinking of the author of their being as a surly creature, who delights not in the latest costume dress, in the sweetest hat that ever came out of a milliner's shop, or in the heaviest plaits of hair that ever were bought "cheaper than cheap," through the kind offices of a friend in Germany.

For my own part, if women choose to go out and work with and like men, it seems to me that it is simple folly to raise any objection.

Years ago, a widower, burying his second wife, loudly expressed his intention of flinging himself into the grave after her coffin, and was, indeed, only restrained from doing so by the strong arms of his friends, who

with difficulty prevented the execution of his project.

The scene was a suburban burial-ground, where people were buried daily by the score ; and as familiarity breeds contempt, or at least indifference, the officiating clergyman proceeded with the service, unmoved alike by the man's grief and the bystanders' expostulations.

Suddenly, however, his noisy lamentations becoming quite unendurable, the curate very mildly remarked, " If the gentleman wishes to get into the grave, there is nothing to prevent his doing so," which unexpected permission at once ended the scene.

The gentleman did not jump in after his wife, any more than a certain other gentleman died on the floor of the House of Commons ; and it is the firm belief of the present writer that if women's rights had never met with the smallest opposition—had a wise public said, " You shall take men's work if you desire it ; you shall hedge and ditch ;



you shall walk four miles to your work in the winter mornings; you shall go down into the sewers; you shall drive dust carts; you shall have businesses, and leave your homes every morning at eight o'clock, so as to reach office by nine; you shall have full liberty to go out, no matter how ill you feel; you shall forget your sex, and let men forget it too, and treat you as they would men, peremptorily and roughly; you shall have households to keep, and incompetent husbands if you like, boring you when you come home for money; you shall go out in all weathers, and face all difficulties, and take all responsibilities, since such is your pleasure" — we should never have had another word of women doing men's work, or wanting to do it either.

It was the gross ignorance of women concerning the battle of life that made them ever wish to go out into it; and I hope and trust the day may come, though writer or reader may not live to see it, when, for the

sake of England's honour and England's glory, her daughters, wearied of the world's clamour and the world's unkindness, may thankfully creep back home, and tell to their grandchildren and their great-grandchildren how much better and happier a thing it is to rule a household aright, and to make bright a fireside for a man's return, than to go forth through the mud and the rain, the melting heat and the suffocating dust, without a dear face and kindly smile looking forth from the open door to welcome one's return.

It is dangerous to preach an old religion when a new is abroad ; and, therefore, to moderate the fury of the storm with which these remarks are certain to be assailed, I will just add in all honesty, that I believe the last state of English society to be far more healthy than that which preceded it. The sore long concealed has been exhibited at last. Instead of women saying over their tea, "Men do no real work," they are crying aloud in the streets, "Give us work !" and

the only matter for real regret in the whole business is that there cannot be found work enough to give them, since it would prove better for women to learn sympathy with men from actual experience than for them to refrain from sympathy altogether.

But, as has been said, on that especial summer evening when Frank Sinclair left the City in order to walk home, women's rights had not been thought of—not in England, at least, save vaguely.

The preliminary notes of war had sounded, it is true, and were carried to human ears like voices from a far distance; but what had actually come to pass was this—that wives were looking distastefully on former occupations, without having taken courage to lay hold on new; that daughters were taking part with their mothers against the stinginess which refused them unlimited credit, and insisted that a ten-pound note should last them, oh! for ever so long; that the willing service, the loving thought-

fulness of a previous generation had become a mere memory of the past, and that women had left their own especial sphere without actually aspiring to shine in that of man.

It was an uncomfortable transition state, that, in which it fared very hardly with many a man who had really very few sins of his own to answer for, and who was merely made the unhappy scapegoat, destined to bear the real or fancied transgressions of previous generations of husbands, forth into the wilderness.

The result to each male who chanced to be selected for this purpose was uncomfortable, and for a long time previously Frank had found his domestic situation unpleasant; and as he walked along, thankful at heart for the pecuniary ease time had brought, his thoughts recurred over and over again to home troubles, and he began marvelling if the fault lay at all with him, and if so, how he could remedy it.

Once more he recalled the past, carefully weighing each step, and asking himself how matters would have been had he acted in this way, or in that. Had he been too reserved? had he been moody, irritable, apparently ungenerous? Might his wife not have mistaken his ill-concealed anxiety, for temper, his desire for economy, for meanness, his abstraction, for want of love? Putting aside the memory of that bright sunshiny time at Mulford, before they twain became one, he could not, even for the children's sake, endure that the mother of his girls and his boys should drift any further away from his affection.

He would make an effort to come to a thorough understanding with her. Sitting in the soft evening light, he would make the experiment of taking her fully into his confidence, and trying to make her understand the precise nature and extent of the difficulties which he had encountered and overcome.

## CHAPTER VIII.

“HOME, SWEET HOME.”

IN one of Miss Ingelow's most charming poems, there is an exquisite description of two who started on their way with the merest trifle of a dancing rivulet dividing them, and the author—I repeat the story, after years, from memory—goes on to tell how the stream grew and widened; how they first were compelled to loosen hands, once clasped together; how by degrees the voice of one failed to reach the ear of the other; how the figures of each grew dim by reason of the waste of waters intervening; and how, finally, they who had commenced

to walk through life together were divided for ever, unless, indeed, they might perchance meet in eternity on the shores of the great sea.

It was just with the same sort of horror with which one might contemplate the possibility of such an end coming to passionate love, to tender friendship, that Frank Sinclair looked forward to the chance of himself and his wife becoming yet further estranged.

He could not tell when or where it had begun; he had no idea when or how it might end. He overlooked the fact that when people whose interests should be identical separate thus, there must have been some tiny stream, so slight as to be scarcely noticeable, dividing them at first; for Frank Sinclair was not yet prepared to say even to himself, “It has been an error all through. The sunshine, and the peace, and the love, and the comfort of that country rectory threw a glamour over me,

from which I have been emerging ever since."

He felt this, but he would not have liked to shape the thought into words, for he was loyal and loving, this man who could not rule his wife, and he would have been content—so the lofty ideal fades, and the dream-castle vanishes—if she would only have looked after their house, and seen to their children, and given him a kindly word of welcome when he came home, and seen that a servant was up in the mornings to get his breakfast ready, and that some sort of repast was prepared for his return at night.

No such utterly prosaic ending of all romance had he pictured to himself when he read poetry to Arabella in the Rectory garden. Now he had neither prose nor verse, and there was the hardship.

It is a sad case when a man cannot at home hope for a repast of any kind, either mental or physical; and with the memory



of breakfasts at the various City hotels, of dinners at Becky's, and Tom's, and Sam's, and Betty's, and of cold weak tea at home, Mr. Sinclair could not delude himself into the idea that matrimony, as he had found it, was very different in point of comfort, though it proved decidedly more expensive, than a first floor furnished at so much a week for a single gentleman, with attendance included.

Well, well ! now that he had time—alas ! how many of us have used that sentence ! sometimes, however, commencing it with "when" instead—now that he had time, he would try to put it right ; he would talk to Bella and see if, for his sake—the sake of the former lover who he knew had once seemed to her like the Fairy Prince—she would not try to make a better thing of life for both of them.

It is but a poor little story, this—about common worldly doings—about people the like of whom we meet every day, who kept

all the commandments, or at least, those of them which the heroes and heroines of ordinary novels most usually transgress; and yet, if I could but convey to my reader even the faintest idea of how utterly piteous and pitiable a thing it seems to me, for a man to trudge homeward over the stony-hearted pavements, carrying such thoughts as these in his heart, I might hope to interest him more in my tale than is the least likely to prove the case.

And here it may be at once confessed that when, long ago, this story of events which fell under my own observation was first planned, my intention was rather to sketch the purely grotesque side of the subject, than to depict troubles that had to be encountered, and very deep sorrows which had to be endured, by reason of Frank Sinclair's folly, and the greater folly, shall we call it, of his wife? But all absurdity has its grave side, all humour its tears; and there may be as much cause for sadness in the fact of a

husband being utterly neglected, as there was—spite of the dictum of the older playwrights—in the fact of a wife’s unfaithfulness.

Slowly the man paced along, planning. In one way he was happy himself, and he wanted to see whether he could not induce Bella to be happier too. He knew enough of life to be well aware that husband and wife ought to be true staunch friends to each other—he to her, she to him. He could not believe in any woman feeling satisfied with the life Bella was leading; and he thought if he talked to her tenderly and lovingly, they might “come together,” so he put it, “again.” As though they had ever really come together yet!

If a man makes up his mind to be conciliatory, it is somewhat irritating to be thrown back upon his good intentions. Frank found it to be so, at all events, when on entering the drawing-room he found several persons there before him, and those

the very persons he most cordially hated to see in the house.

There was a little simpering major, who had a trick of shaking him by the hand for about five minutes at a time, murmuring during the performance unmeaning platitudes about his "dear friend," his "good friend." There was a young lady who painted pictures, and parted her hair considerably on one side, and clothed herself in a loose sort of blouse. There was a lackadaisical woman, with long ringlets, who had worried her husband into a lunatic asylum, and who was now, having lost her occupation, killing time as best she could. There was a young gentleman supposed to have intentions towards the young lady who painted pictures—which however, he kept carefully locked up in the recesses of his own bosom—who was wont to read idiotic verses, chiefly in praise of woman's superiority, to a credulous and admiring audience. There was a middle-aged widow who had taken up

Mendelssohn vehemently, and scoffed at Handel, and who had achieved quite a reputation in certain circles for her rendering of the 'Lieder ohne Worte.' And last, but by no means least, there was Mr. Sinclair's especial abhorrence, a Miss Myrton, who was to him as thistles and sour grapes—as the bitterness of wormwood.

Frank Sinclair had conceived an aversion for Miss Myrton, in comparison to which the Franco-German feud that Englishmen may expect to see raging for the next few centuries will be mildness itself. He detested the woman, who in personal appearance was by no means the sort of woman who is ordinarily detested.

She was not lean; she did not arrange her hair sausage fashion on each side of a high forehead; she had not high cheekbones and a hollow chest; nay, rather, for her years she was comely and well developed. She had fair hair just streaked with grey, and blue eyes, and a still good complexion;

she dressed well, and not too youthfully ; she was courteous enough in her manner, and yet Frank hated the woman, for to her influence he ascribed most of the discomfort of his home.

No tares, though, will grow even if the devil sow them, unless the soil make their seed welcome ; but Bella, discontented and selfish, had welcomed the tares, and behold they bore abundantly.

After the first interchange of civilities between her husband and her guests, Mrs. Sinclair (more, perhaps, by way of hazarding a question than because she felt interested in the matter) inquired—

“ Have you dined ? ”

“ No,” Frank answered, turning from the window out of which he was looking at vacancy.

“ Dear me, how unfortunate ! ” his wife exclaimed. “ I waited for you until half-past five, and then thought it was useless doing so any longer.”

"Of course, for I am generally home at half-past five," Frank answered, with a ring of sarcasm in his voice, only intelligible to those who knew he rarely returned from the city so early.

"But never mind," he went on, glancing at the equipage which then prefigured the kettledrum of more modern times; "I will have a cup of tea."

"Catherine shall make more directly," Mrs. Sinclair declared, and Major Clements was moving to the bell-pull, when Mr. Sinclair stopped him.

"Thank you, no," he said; "I will go down into the dining-room, and have some tea and cold meat there."

Whereupon Mrs. Sinclair and Miss Myrton exchanged glances, as who should say—

"A man all over! Scarcely in the house before he is thinking what he should like to eat and drink."

Certainly if there were anything Frank thought he should like, he did not usually

get it; but that was a view of the question which never came within the range of Miss Myrton's theoretic observation. Not utterly indifferent was that lady to gastronomic considerations, but then she made them subsidiary to the charms of friendship, or at least professed to do so.

Now, if Frank had taken that *rôle*! but, unhappily for his own comfort's sake, Frank did nothing of the kind. He only walked down-stairs, and meeting the housemaid, desired her to bring up tea, and some cold beef if there were any. Referring to that latter item, the housemaid presently returned to say there was none.

"It is of no consequence," Mr. Sinclair replied—and for a fasting man the answer could not be considered unreasonable—"bring me some tea and bread and butter," and he took up a book and began to read.

At the end of half an hour he rang the bell.

"Is that tea soon coming?"



"Oh! if you please, sir, the fire was out, and cook had no wood, and she has sent Jemima out for some."

Then Mr. Sinclair arose and delivered himself of a Commination Service over the head of that "treasure of a housemaid," Catharine Holmes, who dressed Mrs. Sinclair's hair so beautifully. He went on "dreadful," so Catharine subsequently stated in the kitchen; he declared he would get servants who understood their duties, and should perform them; and then, to quote Catharine Holmes' succinct narrative of the interview, "he clapped on his hat and went out of the front door like a whirlwind, banging it after him."

Mrs. Sinclair and Miss Myrton heard the bang in the drawing-room, and correctly interpreted its cause.

## CHAPTER IX.

### UPON OPPOSITE SIDES.

As a rule, when a man has a disagreement or cause of disagreement with his wife, it is usually—in books at least—considered the inevitable consequence that he shall rush off to the gaming-table, the tavern, the boudoir of some more gracious fair, or to that other resort of suffering humanity, his club. As one scale flies up, the other appears—in fiction at all events—to go down. It is now wife and struggling virtue, it is next day no wife to speak of, and utter recklessness. Remove the loadstone from a husband's existence and he drifts—accord-

ing to novelists—as hopelessly as the needle hunting after a lost north pole. The first quarrel is the first step in a downward descent, man being, according to this new doctrine, the weaker vessel and prone to sink. Following which train of argument, had Frank Sinclair adopted the conventional course, he would, on that night when he banged the hall-door of his dwelling-house after him, have returned home excited with wine, and a hundred pounds out of pocket, or perhaps, indeed, never have returned home at all.

But this unheroic hero of mine was really, spite of his good looks and his energetic temperament, only a very commonplace sort of individual, who would as soon have thought of plunging wildly into dissipation because he and his wife were not of one mind, as he would of cutting his throat because he never could get hot water for shaving in the morning; and, accordingly, when after a long, solitary walk he re-

appeared in Briant View Terrace, he was, to all outward appearance, precisely the same individual in every respect who had come home from the City a few hours before.

To outward appearance only, however, for during his ramble he had certainly undergone a change. He left the house angry, and he returned to it calm, it is true; but he also returned sad and almost hopeless. What was to become of his home and his children, if this sort of thing went on? if day by day Bella became less a wife, less a helpmate, less a mother, less a companion, even than at present.

The establishment was in a state of anarchy, the children were neglected, he was miserable. Had the destruction of his day-dream only involved his own comfort, his own happiness, Frank would not so much have cared; he would have let things drift; but he who has given hostages to Fortune may not dare to flee from any

battle, no matter how distasteful the war may prove.

There is nothing so difficult, I imagine, as for a man to reform a bad manager; indeed, it is so difficult that, taking men round, as a rule, they never attempt the task. They sulk, they are angry, they declare things must be altered, they grumble about the household expenditure, they lay the blame on the servants, and then they decide that endurance is the better part of valour, and that what cannot be mended it were wisest to ignore. But Frank could not as yet contemplate with equanimity the possibility of such a life stretching away before him, and he therefore spoke to his wife that night on the subject of her shortcomings, as he had never spoken before.

He pointed out to her, quietly and temperately as he imagined, that even as a breadwinner he was entitled to more consideration than he received. That although it was quite certain a man could put up with a great deal

of annoyance, still it was equally certain whilst he remained in the flesh he could not live without food; that it was unpleasant, to say the least of it, not even to be able to rely upon having a cup of tea in his own house; and he finished by saying that if Bella could not get servants who understood their business and would do it, he must himself try whether he might not prove more fortunate.

Whereupon Mrs. Sinclair declared that of course she had long been aware nothing she could do was right.

“I did not say nothing you could do would be right; I merely expressed my opinion that nothing in the house has been right for a long time,” he replied.

“Then you had better manage the house yourself,” she said. “You would soon tire of it, I can tell you. Men never can enter into the troubles and anxieties of a woman’s life. You think it something wonderful to be able to earn a little money after your way has been

made smooth for you ; but if you had to look after your children, and nurse them through all their illnesses, and were pestered with servants, and received nothing from your husband in return but black looks and cross words, you would be very soon glad to be a man again."

"I do not think, Bella, you can complain of black looks and cross words from me," Frank said gently.

"Yes, you are always grumbling if everything is not in apple-pie order ; but how can things be always in order where there are children, I should like to know ? And then, if I want a little money you are so disagreeable, that I am sure I have often prayed to be shown some way in which I could earn it for myself. You have always quantities of gold and silver in your pockets, and yet when I require a sovereign, it is given to me as though it were a thousand-pound note. You are not so stingy where your own fancies are concerned."

He did not answer her for a moment; he rose and walked up and down the room, then he stopped suddenly and said—

“Bella, what is it that has come between us? why is it that we cannot be of one mind? that you will not understand I want nothing, ask nothing, except what would, I honestly believe, be for the good and happiness of ourselves and our children? Where have I failed in my duty? Is it a sin for a man to ask that the money he earns hardly shall be spent prudently—to complain, when after the day's labour he returns to find his home wretched, his servants idle, his wife engaged with visitors?”

“Am I to have no visitors, then?” she asked sharply. “Am I to live mewed up here without a soul to speak to, whilst you are amusing yourself in the City? If I had only known what you expected from a wife, I would never have married you; and as it is, it seems to me that the best thing for both of us would be never to see each other again;



we should then be able to live without quarrelling, at all events." And having pictured this cheerful connubial future, she burst into tears.

"Shall I ever speak again, or shall I never?" thought the man. And then he gravely kissed his wife and bade her not talk nonsense; and, lighting a candle, went sorrowfully up to bed.

Next morning, the servants having overslept themselves, he left without his breakfast; and as fasting does not generally induce cheerful views of life, Frank Sinclair decided that he was not to have much comfort in his domestic relations, and that the sooner he made up his mind to that fact, the better for all parties concerned.

But during the day he came to a different conclusion. Like most men, he inclined to lay the blame of his home unhappiness on others rather than on his wife. She was badly advised. She had fallen amongst a

set of people who could not understand the difficulties of her position, and who would not let Bella understand them either. He felt quite satisfied, if he could only once make her comprehend that he had not a thought in life beyond her and the children, things might be different. He had made a mistake in taking a house in Briant View Terrace; one in a less pretentious locality, nearer to his business, and further away from her undesirable acquaintances, might change everything.

He would move; he would speak to Bella about it that very night.

But when he returned he found his wife out of temper. She had waited dinner for him, and cook, who liked to have "her evenings clear," was sulky, and everything was spoiled.

"It is always the way," said Mrs Sinclair; "I have tried waiting for you over and over and over again, and then you come in with the same story about being detained,

or having an appointment, or something of the sort."

"Do you think I tell you what is not the truth?" he asked. He then, without waiting for a reply, added, "However, it does not matter; you need never wait for me again."

"But if I do not wait you are out of temper."

"Not if I can get anything to eat; and besides, it is better for me to be out of temper than you."

"And why, pray?"

"Because I can keep silence and you can not."

"Oh, indeed! this is the first time I was aware of your possessing so valuable an accomplishment."

"Do not let us quarrel, Bella," he entreated. If there were one thing he dreaded more than another it was that, perhaps, because he felt if once he quarrelled with her the breach on his part might be difficult to repair.

"I have no desire to quarrel," she answered. "No one can say I ever was the first to commence even an argument."

Hearing which astounding assertion, Frank looked in his wife's face and remained mute, marvelling to himself.

"Can I be as much self-deceived as she? Is the whole or any portion of this miserable wrangling my fault?" And till he had thought the matter over a little longer, he decided not to moot the idea of removing from Briant View Terrace.

That evening, however, he mentioned the desirability of such a plan. He told his wife he considered the house and the neighbourhood too expensive for their means, and he hinted that, for the sake of the children, it would be well to commence laying something aside for that rainy day which, even in a bright noontide in June, it is always prudent to remember must come before Christmas.

Further he explained he found the long

journey night and morning, in all sorts of weather, telling upon his health.

“There are plenty of good houses much nearer the City,” he went on “to be had at comparatively low rentals, and—”

“You want to take me into some low neighbourhood out of reach of all my friends,” finished Mrs. Sinclair; “but I tell you, once for all, I will not move. It is quite bad enough to be left alone the whole day where we are; but it would be worse if I had not a soul to come in and speak to me. If you were so fond of your business as to wish always to be near it, you should not have married at all.”

“You are quite right, Bella,” he answered, “I ought not to have married; but as we can neither of us rectify that mistake now, I am determined to do what I think best for you and the children. It is perfectly ridiculous labouring on year after year, and not being even twenty pounds the richer. Supposing sickness were to

come, that I were to be laid aside for awhile—”

“What is the use of supposing what may never come?” she interrupted. “At all events, moving into a different neighbourhood could not secure good health for ever, and it would make me wretched to leave the few friends who have been so kind to me in my loneliness.”

“I am afraid,” said Frank, “those friends have done much to alienate us.”

“No,” she replied; “if we are alienated, it is your own fault; for many a day you have brought nothing but black looks and utter silence into your own house. The City people you are so fond of have all the pleasant talk, I suppose; at all events, I have not the benefit of it.”

“If I have been dull at home I am sorry,” he began. “I did not wish to cause you anxiety by talking to you of my troubles; but the last few years have proved hard, struggling ones for me, and it is

because I dread a recurrence of such a fight that I want to retrench and curtail our expenditure, so as to have some money before us in case of losses, or bad trade—”

“Oh, I am sick of trade!” Mrs. Sinclair exclaimed impatiently.

“Well, but, my dear, it at all events pays rent and taxes, butcher, baker, and milliner,” he ventured to suggest.

“What is it that pays butcher, baker, and milliner, Mr Sinclair?” at this juncture inquired a visitor who, having entered the drawing-room unannounced, had heard the conclusion of Frank’s sentence. “I am sure I wish I could do something to make money, if it were only that I might give it away in charity. How do you do, dear?”—this to Bella; and then the ladies kissed each other tenderly. “May I really remain?” Miss Myrton continued. “Are you certain I am not *de trop*? I am always so dreadfully afraid of interrupting a conjugal *tête-à-tête*.”

The husband bit his lip as he threw him-

self back in his chair, annoyance mastering politeness ; but Mrs Sinclair evidently welcomed the interruption, even as an out-matched general would gladly greet the coming of a strong ally.



## CHAPTER X.

### RESIGNING THE HELM.

“WHEN you have the misfortune to be a wife,” said Frank drily, to Miss Myrton, “you will find that the conjugal *tête-à-tête* generally has reference to ways and means.”

“Yes, on the man’s side,” observed his wife.

“And on the woman’s too, I think,” he replied. “At all events, I would venture a considerable bet that out of every hundred married men who leave home in the morning for business, ninety-nine have been asked for money by their wives.”

“But why cannot they give it without being asked?” inquired Miss Myrton.

"Because they are men;" and Mrs. Sinclair threw a tone into her explanation which implied that in one word she had summed up the whole case against the sex.

"That certainly is a misfortune," her husband replied; "but still, the business of life could scarcely, I imagine, go on without men to conduct it."

"I can not allow that to pass without contradiction," said Miss Myrton. "I have always held the opinion that there is nothing a man does which a woman could not do better—that is, supposing she has the same social and educational advantages."

"I am not certain that I quite grasp what you mean by social and educational advantages," he answered; "and with regard to the other question, since it has never been practically tried, it must be considered, as you suggest, a matter of opinion. Even you, I presume, would not wish it to become other than a matter of opinion. It is all very well to talk about doing men's work,

but actually performing it would prove quite a different matter."

"If I could not do men's work better than they, I should feel ashamed of myself," remarked Mrs. Sinclair. "They make such a fuss over every little trouble—over every slight annoyance. If they had the constant anxieties women have, they would learn to be more patient and more amiable."

"Well, I do not know," said her husband. "I must say I have never found anxiety improve my temper, nor make me more patient."

"That is because you are a man," explained Miss Myrton, repeating Mrs. Sinclair's former statement; "it is only woman's nature which is perfected through suffering."

For a moment Frank looked at the speaker to see if she were jesting. It had certainly never occurred to him before that she possessed the slightest sense of humour, but it seemed incredible that any rational being could make such a speech in good faith.

One glance at Miss Myrton's face assured him, however, that she was thoroughly in earnest—that her estimate of female character was as high as her opinion of male perfectibility was low, and he therefore asked quietly—

“Pray, have you known many women who, through suffering, have grown more patient and amiable?”

“Yes, numbers,” was the reply. “Oh, I could tell you such tales of passionate natures becoming subdued—of devotedness taking the place of selfishness—of lives passed only in ministering to others, as would, I am certain, convert you to my opinion.”

“And have you never come in contact with unselfishness and amiability in men?” he inquired.

“Never in the domestic circle,” said the lady sadly.

“I must compliment you on your frankness,” he replied, amused almost in spite of himself.

“Of course the present company is always excepted,” Miss Myrton suggested.

“Unless it chance to be masculine,” Frank answered. At which point Mrs. Sinclair declared it was of no use losing his temper; that any one knew all men were selfish; they could not be men unless they were—they could not help it any more than they could help having beards; and the way women gave in to them, and flattered and petted their very weaknesses, increased the evil.

“Why, there is my own father——” she was proceeding, when Frank interrupted her with—

“Than whom a more thorough gentleman never existed.”

“Yes, but the manner in which mamma insists on every thing and person giving way to him is perfectly ridiculous,” persisted Mrs. Sinclair.

“I cannot think so,” her husband answered. “I never saw anything more

beautiful than your mother's love for and devotion towards him. And, Bella, is it not reciprocal? Is not your father's life spent in labouring for his wife, his family, and his parishioners? Does he ever spare himself? does he ever rest when he ought to be at work? Miss Myrton," Frank added, turning towards that lady, "when I am weary of London and London ways, when my very heart seems to grow sick of the selfishness and the frivolity of town life, I think of that quiet country parsonage, and the peace and affection which dwell there, and feel for the time happy."

"And yet gentlemen are not, as a rule, satisfied to lead quiet lives," said Miss Myrton.

"I fancy you are mistaken on that point," was the reply. "Boys may weary of monotony, but when men have experienced the cares of existence they are content, more than content, to step aside into retirement. Of course there are exceptions to all rules, and speculative men, who lead feverish

lives, like to continue doing so to the end. Taking the world round, however, I believe there is a charm to the bulk of men in even the idea of sitting down at peace under the shadow of their own vine and their own fig-tree, which women entirely fail to understand."

"We have no chance of getting tired of action, certainly," remarked Miss Myrton.

"That is precisely the evil of a woman's position," chimed in Mrs. Sinclair.

"Well, I do not know why you should consider it an evil," Frank replied. "For my part, I think a little inaction would suit me remarkably well. It is possible for a soldier to have too much of fighting, and though no man ought to grumble at his business or profession, still it seems inexplicable to me, who have not found my fight easy, how it is that those who can sit at home at ease should find fault with any dispensation of Providence which enables them to do so." And having plainly stated

this opinion, and given his wife what she figuratively called a slap in the face with it, Mr. Sinclair bade Miss Myrton "Good-bye," and went out for his customary evening stroll, in which pleasant thoughts did not always bear him company.

Once again he had failed in carrying his point. What the end of it all was to be he could not even imagine.

Had he not shrunk from laying bare his domestic concerns to the gaze of other people, he would have spoken on the subject to his father-in-law, and requested his advice; but Frank was too loyal and too chivalrous to make complaints about the woman he had married; and besides, he argued, if he could not manage his own wife, who should be able to manage her for him?

Unrestrained, however, by any such delicate scruples, Mrs. Sinclair, the moment the door closed behind her husband, commenced pouring her grievances into her friend's sympathetic ear; and the ladies talked the matter



over, and then turned it and talked it again, till it was proved more conclusively than ever that poor Bella was most miserably united to an inconsiderate and possibly profligate male, "who, very probably, my dear," finished Miss Myrton, "spends nearly all the money he makes in gambling, or worse—for men are all alike."

"And then their wives and families suffer," argued Bella; and yet even as she spoke her conscience, though not over-sensitive, experienced a twinge. Memory and sense could not always be lulled into forgetfulness of patient kindness—of tender forbearance—of slights borne patiently—of a life which might have been happier and more profitable, but for her.

"It is a great pity," went on Miss Myrton, "you have no male relation in London, who could look a little after the interests of you and your children. A wife is so completely in her husband's power that he may waste all his money, and leave her and his family

paupers ; ” and so the wretched woman ran on, inculcating the modern doctrine—which had not in those days become an acknowledged religion—that the interests of man and wife can ever be, except in most exceptional cases, dissimilar ; that it is needful for the law, or for friends, or for male or female relatives, to intervene between the woman and the guardian she voluntarily selected for herself.

And Bella Sinclair listened and believed, and pictured to herself an hour when possibly she and her children might have to return penniless to the paternal roof, because of Frank’s incompetence to manage his business, or recklessness in spending the profits he derived from it.

But this particular vision Mrs. Sinclair refrained from confiding to her husband immediately. Perhaps she had a doubt as to how it might be received by him, and it is possible she would never have revealed the spirit of prophecy with which she had been

suddenly gifted, had Frank agreed to her going out of town in August for the second time in one season, and provided money for capacious lodgings at an expensive sea-side resort.

“No,” he said; “if you want country air you can go to Mulford; you know your mother has written over and over again, asking you and the children to spend a month at the Rectory; and I think you ought to accept the invitation, as it is two years since you have been there. However, if you do not wish to see your parents, please yourself; only I am determined not to spend another hundred pounds merely for the food of sea-side leeches.”

Then the storm broke, and that unhappily in Miss Myrton’s presence. “He could spend fast enough if he wanted it for his own extravagance. Yes—she was not the only person who suspected how the profits of the business went—other people could not avoid seeing how he grudged

every sixpence which was needful for wife or child. It was all nonsense talking about short of money. Every one knew that persons in business could get as much as they desired."

According to Mrs. Sinclair, that was the counterbalance against the vulgarity of trade, and the reason why girls of good family were induced to accept City suitors.

Honestly she believed the City to be a sort of bank, with stores of gold, into which a man had but to dip his hand and take out what he wanted.

"It must be one thing or another," finished Mrs. Sinclair. "You are either incompetent to manage your business, or else the money goes into other channels. You will never make me believe that there is any necessity for this constant pinching, and grudging, and cheese-paring."

"If that be your opinion, then," said her husband, "for the future you and your friends had better take the conduct of affairs ;

for it is not right that, if I be either such a fool or such a scoundrel as they and you make me out, I should retain the reins. There," he added, producing out a bunch of keys and flinging them passionately on the table, "you had better go to the office to-morrow, and make all future arrangements for yourself. As for me, if it had not been for the children I should have gone right away to Australia years ago. It is enough for a man to bear the worry of business during the day, without coming back to such a wretched apology for a home as this."

"What a funny idea!" said Miss Myrton, who, having raised the storm, was somewhat alarmed at its violence, and thought it good policy to treat the quarrel as a jest. "I think it would be rather amusing to play at business for a day."

"It shall be for more than a day," Mr. Sinclair replied, "or else the whole concern shall go to the dogs. As my wife is so clever, she shall have an opportunity of

exercising her particular gift, or else of starving ; for I swear I will never voluntarily go into the City again until she tells me she finds she has made a mistake, and done me the most gross injustice a woman can put upon a man."

"You attach too much importance to what Mrs. Sinclair said," observed Miss Myrton in her new character of peace maker.

"No, he does not," interposed that lady sharply. "I meant it, every word. I would not have married had I thought it ever could have come to this."

"I will not recriminate," her husband answered ; "but neither will I draw back. Keep the keys, go down to the office, and do what you like. You can rummage my papers as much as you please, but you will find no love-letters or betting-books amongst them. It is high time there was some change, and if you think you and your friends can do better for yourself and the children than I have done, in God's name

take the helm. Only remember that what I have said I mean. I will never resume the conduct of affairs, until you tell me you are as sick of responsibility as I have been for this many and many a day ;” having announced which agreeable resolution, Mr. Sinclair walked out of the room and the house.

“ My dear, you have gone too far,” said Miss Myrton.

Perhaps for the moment Mrs. Sinclair thought so also, for her face was very white as she arose and, taking up the keys, put them in her pocket.

## CHAPTER XI.

### PLAYING WITH EDGED TOOLS.

WHEN, next morning, Frank Sinclair awoke, it was with the impression that something disagreeable had occurred, which would have immediately to be faced; but directly after he decided it must be Sunday morning, and the reason which caused him to arrive at this conclusion was that he heard a stir and rustle in his wife's dressing-room, suggestive of the donning of gorgeous apparel.

Not given to early rising when it might, perhaps, have proved a satisfaction to her husband, Bella always on Sundays displayed a fearful activity, and therefore for a moment Frank decided it must be that



one morning in the week when he and his wife walked forth together. Such pleasant experiences as a companion for a couple of miles on his way to the office, or a familiar face meeting him on his return from the City and taking his arm as a matter of right and love whilst they strolled back together, were things of the past and long ago. Even that Arcadian sun had shone but for a very brief period, and after the first few weeks had set altogether.

It was only for a moment, however, that Frank imagined Sunday had come round again. Almost as he heard the rustle of his wife's skirts the events of the previous evening recurred to his memory. He remembered Bella's words, he recalled his own; the moment when, like a gauntlet of old, he flung down his keys, was reproduced for his benefit; he recollected telling his wife to take the management of affairs, and behold—but it never could be—she had determined to keep him to his word.

Frank pulled down his watch, and looked at the hands. It was precisely half-past seven. He held the watch to his ear. It was going, and his eyes had not deceived him. He raised himself on his elbow and looked through the half-open door of the dressing-room. There he beheld a vision as of a woman arrayed in purple and fine linen. At this point Frank Sinclair lay down again and thought.

She had taken a burst of passion for the declaration of a settled opinion, and elected to abide by it. She had done a marvellous thing, at least so he considered—risen in the morning in the same mind as she closed her eyes at night. She really believed him to be incompetent, herself capable of managing a business; and, not out of any undue feeling of vanity, but merely because he could not understand such utter non-comprehension of life's difficulties, Frank almost laughed aloud at the idea.

Could such insanity really exist? the man

asked himself; for, after all, his experiences of the humours of humanity were limited, and he did not then quite grasp the fact that if there are a hundred men preaching sermons, doing their best to keep businesses together, writing books, painting pictures, designing new inventions, there are a thousand men who honestly believe they could preach better sermons, make larger sums out of business, write more successful books, paint finer pictures than those who have made such things the employment of their lives.

It is so easy, theoretically, friend, to manage your neighbour's affairs better than he does; there is nothing at all difficult in driving mentally through crowded streets whilst another man holds the reins, which of course you could manipulate better. If only you had the editorship of some one of our magazines, you would speedily raise the circulation from thousands to tens of thousands; and if Smythe would kindly give you his

chance—let you, in effect, step into the business he has made in the sweat of his brow—you could retire on a quarter of a million within five years.

Which is all very well; only, perhaps, if you had the management of your friend's affairs, you would land him in the *Gazette* before many months were over, as certainly as you would come to grief in the City, if you were to undertake to charioteer yourself through it.

Hitherto Frank Sinclair had scarcely viewed his wife's opinions from a serious point of view. Her temper, her management—or rather want of management—her selfishness, her unreasonableness, had annoyed him sorely; but he had never realised until now that his wife considered him a mere cumberer of the ground—a mere obstacle between herself and opulence.

“It is because she knows no better,” he thought. “One day will sicken her: let

her go. If such be her opinion, it is well she should prove its fallacy." And straightway he rose and dressed, and descended to the dining-room, where Mrs. Sinclair was partaking of hot tea and toast, ham, eggs, and other edibles.

"This is a change," said the master of the household, seating himself opposite his wife. "My dear Bella, how did you get the servants up?"

"Oh! I told them it was necessary I should be away early," answered his wife; to which he retorted mentally—

"Was it not a pity you never told them I must be away early?"—forgetful, or perhaps unconscious, of the fact that women work by fits and starts; for which reason it may be that their labour is "never done," while "men's work is from sun to sun."

"What a lovely morning!" Mrs. Sinclair remarked. She was in quite a conversational mood.

"Exquisite," answered Frank; but still,

the beauty of the morning did not strike him with any sense of novelty, for he had been able to admire many such whilst his wife's eyes were closed in slumber.

"I must run away and put on my bonnet," she suggested, standing in the doorway.

Many a time afterwards he saw her standing thus, with just a shadow of expectancy—just a trace of fear in her face. Did she wish him to remonstrate? Frank could not tell. The game had begun: how would it end?

He walked to the window, and looked out, thinking the while whether he should permit this folly to continue, or tell his wife there had already been too much of it. If she really thought he were incompetent, or a rogue, was not it better she should have an opportunity of proving or disproving her suspicions?

Let her go for the one day, at all events. Let her take his keys, and read his letters,

and look over his papers, and ransack his drawers. Let her see, for once, what life in an office was like. Perhaps there might be peace between them after such an experience. At all events, her temper was already improved. Yes, he mentally, in cool blood, repeated the resolution he had made in his anger the preceding night. She would not be inclined, he felt confident, to rise at such an unwonted hour a second time; but before he resumed the reins she should confess the extent of her injustice, and some clear understanding should also be arrived at concerning their future life.

He would take advantage of this opportunity, and, after letting her weary of her own way, endeavour to put matters on a more satisfactory footing than had yet been established between them.

Clearly enough he now saw where his mistake had been from the first. He had given in to his wife's fancies, petted, humoured, pampered her till, like a spoiled child, she

did not know what she wanted, and could find no better amusement than quarrelling with a man who had for so long a time refused to quarrel with her in return.

Yes, she should go. "She will return at night," he said to himself, "weary and humble enough. She will give me back my keys, and say she does not think a man's life so pleasant a one after all."

Thus Frank reasoned, forgetting that none of the annoyance of business would be at all likely to cross her path. She would be exempt from anxiety, from care, from fear, because utterly ignorant of there being cause for any one of the three. Tired she might return, but enlightened certainly not. But the man could not foresee all this, and perhaps if he had foreseen he would still have permitted her to continue in the road she seemed to desire to travel.

It was with a sense of satisfaction that Mr. Sinclair noticed the utter unsuitability of his wife's dress for the rôle she intended



to adopt. Had she been about to pay a morning visit at the town house of the Dean of Ringleton, or to join a pic-nic organised by the Honourable Mrs. Clace, she could scarcely have arrayed herself with greater magnificence.

"You will get your dress into a mess, I am afraid, in my dusty office," said Frank, as he walked with her to the outer gate.

"Oh! no," answered Bella, smiling graciously; "I shall have all that put to rights, now."

"Good Heavens!" thought her husband; but he held his peace, and just then the omnibus appearing, he put her into it.

"Good-bye," she said, and held out her hand almost affectionately.

"Good-bye," he answered, and clasped her fingers in his.

After that the conductor banged the door, and Frank, having watched the omnibus out of sight, walked slowly back into the house and sat down in the dining-room to think,

until interrupted by the entrance of his eldest child, who came to ask—

“Is it really, really true, papa, you are going to stay at home for a whole day?”

“Yes, Minnie, I intend doing so.”

“And please, dear papa, may we have a holiday?”

“I imagined it was always holiday with you,” he said.

“Not quite,” she answered; “I have to practice my scales, and draw blocks, and teach the little ones to spell—Patty is in two syllables.”

“And what are you but a little one?” he asked.

“Oh, papa!” Miss Minnie exclaimed reproachfully, and then she flung her arms round his neck and asked him again for the coveted holiday.

“It shall be as you like, dear,” he replied.

“And will you take us for a walk?”

“What, all of you?” her father remonstrated.

"I do not mean, of course, the baby," she explained, "for he would soon get tired, or even Harry; but me, and Tom, and Susie."

"And where shall we go?"

"Go? oh, anywhere!" and she ran away clapping her hands, and calling out at the top of her voice, "Tom, Susie, we are going out with papa!"

"Surely," considered Mr. Sinclair, "this is not such a miserable sort of existence, after all, that Bella should declare it insupportable, and envy me the drudgery of my City life. However, she will not, I fancy, care to repeat to-day's experiment, and I then really must talk to her seriously. Poor Bella! I wish we could understand each other better. Now the pecuniary anxieties are at rest, how happy we might be!"

And so, never doubting but that the day would end Mrs. Sinclair's aspirations after a business career, Frank set himself thoroughly to enjoy his holiday. He took

the three children to Richmond, where they all ate "maids of honour," and roamed about for hours.

Had it not been for thoughts of his wife, and a certain pity he could not help feeling for the mortification he believed she was preparing for herself, he would have been perfectly happy, and even as it was he could answer Minnie's question, whether he did not feel ever so much better for his holiday, in the affirmative.

For he did feel better and younger for the change, slight though it had been; and it was not until he came again within sight of his own house that the old dull, gloomy feeling crept over him once more. Life in Briant View Terrace did not seem so cheerful an affair as it had done amongst the pleasant Richmond meadows—existence, with the prospect of his wife returning home tired and cross after her self-imposed task, was not exactly the same thing as it appeared while listening to his children's

prattle as they walked beside the "silvery Thames."

But when Mrs. Sinclair returned, a first glance at her face dispelled Frank's apprehensions with regard to a stormy evening. She had a great deal to say, and said it. She asked Frank how he had amused himself; and when, in turn, he inquired if she were not very tired, she said cheerfully—

"No; I have done nothing to tire me. I only looked over some of your papers, to put them in order, and answered a whole tribe of letters I found you had left without reply. It seems to me that you cannot have been a very regular correspondent."

At which assertion Frank smiled. He could have told of reams of letters written, and copied, and posted. He could have told stories of that last hour before six o'clock, which might have appalled any person less fond of pen and ink than his wife; but her passion was correspondence. She wrote and crossed and recrossed epistles;

filled quire after quire of note paper with details of events not worth recording, of gossip not worth repeating; and Mr. Sinclair knew it was in vain to tell her that perhaps the hardest work of a business man's life is replying in writing to the mass of inquires which each morning's post, ay, and each succeeding post, brings with it.

"Did you keep copies of your letters?" he asked.

"No. Your head clerk there—what is his name?—said something about copying them; but I had used the wrong ink, and of course it was not worth while writing the whole of them over again."

"I do not suppose it will signify," said Frank, with a little unconscious irony.

"There was nothing in them of the slightest consequence," she replied, which made her husband laugh in spite of himself, as he answered—

"Perhaps that may have been the reason they were left without reply."

To which "sarcasm," as Miss Myrton would have called it, Mrs. Sinclair deigned no answer.

"You have had enough of the City, I should think, Bella," her husband remarked, after a pause.

"Enough of the City!" she repeated; "why, I have but just begun to go to it."

"And of course you never wish to go there again; that is what all ladies say."

"That may be what the ladies you know say; but I say, having once received your authority, I intend to go to the City till I have got things a little into order."

"Till you have got what?"

"Till I—have—got—things—a—little into—order," she said, laying a distinct emphasis on each word.

For a moment Frank paused, then he began—

"It is quite time, Bella, that you and I came to a thorough understanding. I have tried to consider to-day's escapade a joke—"

"Oh ! you have," she interrupted.

"But now," he went on, unheeding, "I want to know whether all this be a matter of conviction or of temper."

"It may be a matter of temper on your part ; it is one of conviction on mine," said Mrs. Sinclair.

"That is to state in plain English," he replied, "you consider I am unable to manage my own business, and that you are able to manage it."

"If you like to word it so—yes."

"And that you—a woman, a wife, a mother—really desire to take my place because of my supposed incapacity."

"I want anything which shall make our home happier," she answered.

"And God knows so do I," he argued. "Then it comes to this—that you are to be the man, and I the woman ; that you are to do my work—for I swear we shall not both do it ; that you are willing to turn out in all weathers, to meet all sorts of



people, to endure all sorts of unpleasantness; and I am to remain at home, to manage the cook and the housemaid, to see that the children learn their lessons, and that the doctor is duly sent for if one of them evince any signs of feverishness."

"That is the work to which you would doom us women," she said.

"Then in Heaven's name take men's work, and see how you like it," he retorted. "I will never try to baulk your fancy again. Do you know, Bella," he went on, with a forced laugh, "all this folly of ours reminds me of a story I once heard about a Mr. and Mrs. Gourley, who could not agree. She always—figuratively, of course—desired to wear a portion of his garments, to which he naturally enough objected. Well, to cut a long story short, one morning he got up, and, putting on her clothes, said, 'Now, Mrs. Gourley, before sunset we must decide whether I am to be you or myself;' and while the controversy waxed warm, a knock

came, which was answered by the master of the house himself.

“‘Can I see Mr. Gourley?’ asked the visitor.

“‘No, I do not think you can at present,’ was the reply.

“‘Why, surely you are Mr. Gourley?’ said the other.

“‘I am not certain for the moment who I am,’ answered Mr. Gourley, ‘but if you come back this afternoon I may be able to answer your question.’

“He came back in the afternoon—”

“And?” questioned Mrs. Sinclair.

“Mr. Gourley was Mr. Gourley once again; and Mrs. Gourley, Mrs. Gourley still.”

“What a foolish story!” said the lady.

“Yes, my dear,” was the answer; “there are a great many foolish stories, and foolish people, about in the world still.”

“That there certainly are, particularly

the latter," said Mrs. Sinclair, as she rose to light a chamber candle.

"Then you are quite determined to continue going to the office?" said Mr. Sinclair.

"Quite, as you have goaded me on to this point—unless you wish to withdraw your permission."

"Oh! no," he answered. "When I go to the City again you shall ask me to do so—be quite satisfied on that point, Bella."

And yet ten minutes after he was anathematising his own obstinacy and his own folly. "She will tire," he comforted himself by thinking, "in a day or two, and be very glad for me to take her place."

But the days went by, and still she did not ask him to take her place, and showed no sign of either weariness or distrust.

## CHAPTER XII.

### MR. SINCLAIR'S DIARY.

ABOUT this time a very remarkable thing occurred. Mr. Sinclair commenced keeping a diary, and from it for the future extracts shall be given. The opening paragraphs reveal its *raison d'être*. Mr. Sinclair's volume commenced as follows:—

“A month ago, had any one told me I should ever write a journal, I should have laughed the idea to scorn. I always thought it was an occupation only fit for girls, childless wives, and hopeless spinsters; and yet, here am I, strong in body, sound in

limb, who ought to be in the City looking after the interests of myself and family, sitting in this cool room like a Sybarite, with flowers near, and sunshine all around me, inditing just for want of something to do and some one to talk to—not indeed a goodly matter, but a chronicle of such small beer as is brewed in the course of my daily life.

“It is not a bad life as times go. If I could get over the absurdity of my anomalous position, and feel assured that things in the City were not going to the dogs, I should rather like it. Suppose some decent fellow, now, somebody whom I do not know—for in the first place decent fellows are rare, and decent fellows blessed with fortunes are still rarer—were to give or leave me ten thousand pounds on condition of my leading so purely simple an existence, I could do it without grumbling; but, then, *not* having the ten thousand pounds makes all the difference.

“This is not much like a diary, I am afraid ; at least it is not at all like the thing I kept in the City. In that I know there is: 13th—See Jones 12 o’clock. 14th—Meeting of Creditors re Robinson. 15th—Smith’s promissory note. 16th—Own acceptance, and so forth. But that is not a diary exactly ; it is a series of memoranda of disagreeable events which are to be—not a chronicle of events that have occurred. A man I know in the City could tell me where he dined any day for the last twenty years, and he has preserved the *menu* of every grand banquet of which he has partaken for a similar period ; but that is not keeping a diary. A lady who used to visit me has a record of how she spent each evening since she was eighteen, we will say ; and, according to her dates, she must now be three-and-thirty. If one may believe that diary, she has met or seen every person worth meeting or seeing, and can tell one what they wore and what they said. But that is not a diary

precisely—at least, it is a diary only of the thoughts, speeches, and feelings of other persons, not of one's own. A true diary, it seems to me, would be that of a fellow who commenced keeping it when he could speak, and got some one else to write it for him till he learned to make pot-hooks for himself. I wish babies could keep diaries; I should like to know what they think about.

“Well, here am I, as I have said, writing a history, which I mean to read some day to Bella, when she has come to her senses. By that time, possibly, it will be the only article of property left to us. If I could go back and prevent her making such an incredible idiot of herself, should I prevent it? No, I think not. It was, perhaps, quite time she went to the City and I stayed at home. The place where ruin is wrought signifies but little. If she do not ruin me at the office, she would certainly have done so here.

“I have been at home, now, for six days.

Speaking correctly, this is the sixth—Tuesday. The first day I took the children to Richmond. The second, I went with them to Greenwich. Saturday, in order to place myself in funds to sustain the siege my wife evidently intends to maintain, I went to a broker in Broad Street, and directed him to sell out a few shares I held in a certain unprofitable little company, that has never yet paid anybody connected with it three per cent. The result of that sale I saw in yesterday's *Times* (I treat myself now to the *Times*, at a penny an hour). The shares are down a quarter; so at this juncture I am glad it was I who sold, and not somebody else. I mean, when I get the proceeds, to open a fresh banking account—perhaps at the savings bank—and so place myself in an independent position as regards house-keeping.

“I hope I never made housekeeping or pocket or pin money unpleasant to Bella. I do not think I should like to have to ask her



for daily supplies; and yet I am aware my omitting to do so is filling her mind with the darkest suspicions as to my former probity.

“ ‘People cannot go to Richmond and Greenwich for nothing,’ she argues, I have no doubt, ‘and he must, therefore, have had a large amount stored away, of which I knew nothing.’ Well, Bella, the day may come when you will know me better—the day has come in which I know you better, and the knowledge is not quite agreeable.

“ Being left in charge of an establishment, I had an idea—possibly erroneous—that I ought to look after it a little, and consequently inquired yesterday for the tradesmen’s weekly bills.

“ ‘Missus don’t have any,’ answered the housemaid.

“ ‘Well, but there must be some bills this week, because I have paid for nothing,’ I said, my conscience accusing me the while that I had been less careful than my wife.

“‘If you please, sir, I think they run to the end of the quarter,’ was the woman’s reply.

“Hearing which, I ascertained the names of the tradespeople, and sallied out to ask for a statement of our general indebtedness.

“When a woman has a certain sum per week entrusted to her in order to pay butcher, and baker, and candlestick maker, I think she ought to pay them; but that is, I am aware, a mere matter of opinion. This is one of the many advantages of being a wife. Had Arabella been my housekeeper, I certainly should have been entitled to give her in charge for misappropriation.

“But I must not condemn her unheard. Here are the bills—not pleasant to look upon. The butcher’s, a series of hieroglyphics, the only intelligible thing in the business being the sum total; the milkman’s, which he ekes out with halfpennies as largely as he does his milk with water; the baker, who out of quarterns has con-

structed an edifice of debt almost as big as the Pyramids; the greengrocer, who deals likewise in oranges and nuts, fresh strawberries, and fruit for preserving, and who seems, if his statement be correct, not yet to have received remuneration for the mistletoe under which I kissed nobody last Christmas Day, and the holly which adorned our drawing-room mirror, to the serious detriment of a new satin paper.

“There are others likewise. Here is a very dirty envelope, the seal of which is wet and clammy, and as I draw forth the paper it seems to be redolent of shrimps. Gracious Heaven! When could we—when did we—eat all this fish? Whilst as for the coal merchant, it is a simple impossibility that our modest household ever consumed this amount of fuel.

“Poor Bella! If she had such a series of Damocles' swords hanging over her head, I do not wonder at her temper being a trifle sour.

“What ought I to do? Accept the bills as correct and pay them, or ask her about them? Certainly not the latter. She must never be able to say I could not manage the house as well as she can manage the office, and so far she has not condescended to ask me a question. I informed her, indeed, that no money ought to be paid to any one until after the fifth, when a heavy bill would have to be provided for; but she has treated my suggestion with indifference—at least so McLean, whom I have requested to call or write no more on business, informed me.

“Perhaps she may have had as cogent reasons for not paying these gentry, as I for not heeding the smaller fry of duns till the great wolf was satisfied; but of course her reasons cannot affect me. Better clear all off, and begin *de novo*, on a strictly cash system. Then I shall see what a style of living by no means princely or luxurious really costs. At present it strikes me that, by comparison, lodging-house life is economy itself.

“As for Bella, emphatically the City suits her admirably. Her temper is divine; her appetite excellent. The way in which she rises morning after morning at the first tap of Catharine’s knuckles fills me with a terrible surprise, not to say envy; and what amazes me still more is the way in which Catharine and Anna Maria arise also. To be sure, I have ascertained that they take it in turn to prepare breakfast, and that when Catharine comes down Anna Maria returns to her couch—which is an admirable arrangement, though one, I should have imagined, scarcely contemplated by Mrs. Sinclair when they were engaged. Further, Elizabeth, the nursery-maid, has the kitchen fire always lighted for them, and the kettle on, by the time they come down, and they lay the breakfast things over-night, so the hardship is reduced to a minimum.

“However, that early rising is a hardship no one can deny. Even Arabella has, I fancy, some idea of the kind. She yawns

frequently now at breakfast, and does not say much about the beauty of the morning.

"I wonder when she will tire of it—or rather confess she is tired of it. One thing I do know, however: even when she is heartily disgusted with the City—as I would to Heaven she were now—I will interfere a little more in the expenditure here than I have ever done. I will not have such another array as this marshalled before me. I thought we might have been extravagant; but imagined we had, at least, paid our way. It seems in this I was mistaken. Moral: In how many things may one be mistaken?

"*Wednesday*.—Before paying the accounts referred to in yesterday's chronicle, I examined a few of the items—notably those charged on Thursday, Friday, Saturday—and have come to the conclusion that if the goods so charged ever arrived on the premises, they were not consumed there. What confirms me in the latter opinion is, that when a sirloin of beef which did duty on

Sunday hot, re-appeared on Monday cold, it was but a wreck of its former self.

“ So far I have made no observations ; but observations concerning the children’s dinner have been made to me, and yet of my own personal knowledge I can state that their mid-day repast consisted on Monday of boiled mutton and a huge plum pie, of both of which dishes I partook, not without relish. Further, there have been dark allusions to a cat, which I generally see either in the embrace of Susie, or else fast asleep on a mat in the conservatory. Cats, I believe, are addicted to thieving, but I never yet heard of one that had a *penchant* for brandy and water, or even a glass of wine, and yet these articles diminish unaccountably.

“ Perhaps our cat is an abnormal creature, and tipples when no one is by. If this be the case all I can say is, spite of her demure looks, she must be the most deceitful of her sex. However, time proves most things, and supposing I ever detect puss sipping

intoxicating liquor from a decanter, having previously taken out the stopper to facilitate arrangements, I shall certainly set up a show in the front garden, and invite the superfluous sixpences of all passers-by.

“Meanwhile, Bella still goes to the City. She does not like, I fancy, being remarked as a ‘regular passenger,’ so now we walk down the road till we strike a fresh line of omnibuses, by one of which she proceeds to her destination. Not a sentence about business have I heard for a whole week, I have not opened a letter, I have not asked a question, I have not had any confidence reposed in me. McLean came up to tell me there would not be enough money to meet Allington’s bill, as Mrs. Sinclair was paying every one who asked for cash the most persistently; but I informed him I had left everything to her management, and did not want to be troubled about business again at present.

“The look of pity on the fellow’s face



would have been absurd had it not been so genuine. Clearly he thinks I have lost my senses. The neighbours imagine I am ill; seeing me lounging about the garden, and walking with the children at unwonted hours, they have arrived at the conclusion that something is the matter with my health, and some half-a-dozen have sent cards and kind inquiries, and even gone the length of stopping Minnie in the street to ask whether her papa be ill, and what is the matter with him.

“Here, likewise, is a letter I have just received—

“ ‘Southampton, August 18th.

“ ‘DEAR SINCLAIR,—I cannot tell you how distressed I was to hear of your illness from McLean. What is wrong? I fear it must be something serious to necessitate your staying at home for so long a time. Had I not been compelled to leave for Guernsey to-night, I should have run up to see you. I heard Mrs. Sinclair was in town, and called at the office, but she was out, and I could not wait for her return. If I can be of any service, pray command me.

“ ‘Yours faithfully,

“ ‘R. VARHAM.’

“I wonder what he thinks is the matter with me. Softening of the brain, possibly. Hardening of the heart would be nearer the mark. Oh ! to think of all I hoped, of all I expected, of the happy home-picture I drew for myself in the garden at Mulford !

“And yet, perhaps, I am scarcely right to think myself a fool ; for if I am one, I am only one in company with the wisest and strongest of men. Was not Adam but as a reed in the hands of Eve ? And why should I blame myself for not being cleverer than the greatest historical characters since the Creation ?

“Why indeed ? But I am placed in a more difficult position than any of them—at least, so it seems to me—and that makes me, perhaps, too severe on my own want of moral courage. Adam had no house to manage. Samson pulled one about the ears of his persecutors. Solomon took to berailing men, women, and circumstances ; but no man with whom I am acquainted, in the

whole range of sacred or profane story, was ever left at home with a house and servants and five small children on his hands, whilst his wife, who had never managed her own establishment, undertook to manage his affairs.

“Heaven send me safe through it! Tomorrow I think I shall make a trial trip to the basement, and see what is going on in the kitchen. It will not be a nice expedition, but it may be necessary for all that.

“‘Papa,’ says Susie, climbing on my knee at this juncture, ‘what is a Molly Coddle, and who is Mr. Paul Pry?’

“With a dreadful prevision of what was to follow, I answered, ‘A Molly Coddle, my dear, is a philanthropist towards himself and his own wants; and Mr. Paul Pry is a kindly sort of person, who takes a great interest in the welfare of his friends and neighbours.’

“‘Then that is what Catharine says you are,’ said my candid darling, laying her rosy

cheek on my shoulder, and looking up into my face with her great blue eyes.

“Clearly, the fact that children should be taught to honour their father and mother has formed no part of Catharine’s education.”

## CHAPTER XIII.

### FROM ANOTHER SIDE.

“MY DEAREST MILLICENT (thus Mrs. Sinclair, who wrote long letters instead of a diary—there are some women who do so, just as there are some women happily who do neither), you will be anxious to hear all about my proceedings, and I therefore, having finished my morning’s work, devote the remainder of this lovely forenoon to *you*.

“How I envy you, dear independent creature, who can go here and there without being controlled by either circumstances or home ties! Take my advice, and *never marry*. I say this, although Frank has been

amiability itself since I have put my shoulder to the wheel. No doubt he felt himself unequal for the work—*entre nous*, he ought to have been the woman, I the man. He has just the quality of mind which delights in looking after small details. I have heard of persons who could do anything, from tying a shoe-string to calculating the coming of a comet; but for my part, I do not believe such legends. It must be shoe-string *or* comet, of that I am quite certain.

“Well, my dear, but this is digressing, and I have so much to say, and so little space to say it in. Whilst you are luxuriating beside the glorious sea, here am I writing to you from a City office, to which I have come regularly every day (Sunday, of course, excepted) for a whole week. Thank you for your kind answer to my little note telling you I had got into harness.

“The office is not at all dingy—indeed, it is much more cheerful than many a sitting-room; and I have had it thoroughly cleaned and put to rights.

“How Frank ever was able to find his papers, I cannot imagine—but then, what would a man’s shelves and drawers be like at home, if a woman were not always at hand to make things tidy ?

“From where I sit there is a glimpse of the Thames, looking bright and silvery in the sunshine, and there is nothing in all this City life which seems dull and dreary, as men try to make it out. Indeed, could I walk into other offices, and make and do business like a man, I think a commercial career must be very exciting and pleasant ; but in the present imperfect state of society, a woman can do nothing *but bear the burdens man places on her shoulders*. I hope I am effecting a little good here, however. The clerks, particularly one McLean, seem to be most industrious and anxious. You can easily understand that until I came to the office they never comprehended the importance of constant and devoted attention.

“Mr. McLean, indeed, rather bores me

with advice, but I make allowances for over-zeal.

“Do you know, I rise now quite early, and feel the better for it? Whilst you, luxurious creature, are sipping the cup of coffee Finette brings you or reading pleasant letters from friends, I am travelling by omnibus to the City.

“I do not now come by what I used to call Frank’s omnibus, as I found the gentlemen were beginning to regard me as a ‘regular passenger,’ and wished to establish a speaking acquaintance on the strength of the fact. I very much dislike the omnibus journey, however, by *any* route. I meet many girls and women going to City warehouses and workrooms, and I cannot say they have confirmed my idea concerning the glorious future in store for our sex.

“Ah, my dear, how sadly has female education been neglected! I assure you these poor creatures have not an idea beyond dress, admiration, and amusement. When



a gentleman gets into the omnibus it is *quite pitiable* to see the conscious looks of even *very plain* girls, who giggle and bite their lips, and whisper to each other, as if a husband were *the one thing needful*.

“I am afraid many of them think he is. How will it be ten years after marriage? How indeed!

“Every morning Frank walks with me to the omnibus. At first he made some little opposition to my taking his place, but that has now quite ceased. The children and he seem perfectly happy together, but the servants naturally do not like my absence or his interference.

“They have been much more attentive lately, however. I think it touches them seeing how hard *I* have to work: at all events, I never am obliged to wait one second for my breakfast, and you remember how poor Frank used to complain of having to go without any—*but then men are so impatient*.

“Do you know, dear, since I came here I have paid away nearly one thousand pounds. It seems a great deal of money, does it not? The interest would be fifty pounds a year for life, so you see I must have been right, and that the business is a good one if only properly managed.

“There was one poor man to whom I paid two hundred and fifty pounds. He assured me with tears in his eyes that he had been trying to get that amount from Mr. Sinclair for six months without avail, and that the payment would preserve him from bankruptcy.

“He took my hand in *both* of his and *blessed* me. And now, just to show you what men are, even the best of them, when Mr. McLean came in he was quite put out at the poor man having been paid. He said he was a swindler and a hypocrite, and told me in so many words that I should bring destruction on the business.

“He is always talking about some stupid

payment on the fifth, as though, when a thousand pounds has been raised in so short a time, there would not be plenty to meet a dozen payments between this and the fifth. If it were not that Frank is now so kind and good, and devotes himself so completely to my amusement and comfort, I could *shriek aloud* when I think of the manner in which he used grudgingly to give me five pounds.

“Why, fifty times five would be nothing out of such a business, properly managed. Yesterday I bought the sweetest dress you ever beheld, and a wonderful bargain in checked silk for the girls; but do you know, I have not yet had courage to take the parcel home. Last week I ordered a new bonnet, and Frank said—

“‘Ah! I thought the City would soon take the gloss off that splendid lilac affair.’

“Of course he meant it for a sneer—because men never can understand how unsuitable a woman’s dress is, if she be

intended to do actual work; and in consequence I do not like to send home the dresses. I have locked them up in a cupboard, for when Mr. McLean saw the label he groaned—actually groaned, my dear!

“You will laugh when I tell you the part of City life I dislike most—having to live on sandwiches. The first day I had nothing but a Bath bun and a strawberry ice; the next, a biscuit and a little lemonade; the third, I took Mr. McLean into my confidence, told him I was a very poor breakfast-eater, and had always been accustomed to take luncheon when my children had their dinner in the middle of the day. I think that touched him—men are so stupid about children, although they will not sacrifice anything for them—and he actually undertook to get me a chop.

“Shall I ever forget that chop? It was brought in on a hot-water dish, and *swam* in grease, which had saturated the potatoes. There were besides a thick lump of bread,

a salt-cellar without a spoon, a japanned pepper-castor, a knife with a black handle, and a steel fork.

“If I add that the tray was covered with a soiled cloth, you may imagine the appetising nature of the repast.

“This is the direct effect of man’s presence. Each day I see Mr. McLean partaking with relish of just such a meal, so served.

“Of course, I could not touch the dainty repast, and have ever since brought some sandwiches with me. But sandwiches are apt to grow monotonous.

“Since I wrote the first part of this letter, there has been a great upset at home. Frank, like all men hasty, discharged the cook, and the housemaid discharged herself.

“*Imagine my feelings* when I entered one evening to find both servants gone, and no one save an ignorant girl in charge of the establishment. I remonstrated, but of

course unavailingly. I proposed to make peace, I whose household was always peaceful, but was met with the assurance that I could not do two things. I could not manage a business in the City and my servants at home as well.

“I said ‘I thought I could,’ but Frank, with almost a sneer, said, ‘No, the thing is impossible. Either you must be Mrs. Gourley,’ he remarked, referring to that horrid story, ‘or I must; and if you elect to return to be Mrs. Gourley, I shall expect the establishment to be much better managed than heretofore. I cannot afford to feed a dozen families out of my income.’

“Having uttered which nasty jeer, he went out for a walk with Minnie; and while I was crying ready to break my heart in the drawing-room, Susie came up to my chair, and said, ‘Mamma, you are not one-half so nice as papa.’ I could not help slapping her. Really children are as ungrateful as adults. And then she began to cry, and

say she would tell her papa; and she did tell him, but he only remarked aggravatingly—

“ ‘You are mistaken, Susie, I am not one-half so nice as your mamma; I indulge you too much, and it is not well for children to be indulged.’

“ ‘I think it is well for me,’ Susie said, and then she drew up quite close to him, far as possible from me—and I have always tried to be so kind to my children. Haven’t I, dear Millicent?

“I do not really think any woman was ever so sadly placed as I. *No one* seems to sympathise with me, except you, dearest. You understand my trouble and my position. Fancy five children and an utterly incompetent husband—amiable, but powerless to avert misfortune or maintain a position! What will be the result of all this? Shall I be able to put things on a more satisfactory footing, or are they hopeless? To be sure, I must say that, spite of poor Frank’s neglect,

the business appears healthy, and capable of much extension.

“Judging from the tone of his correspondents, he has not answered letters regularly; and I trust, therefore, that much business will follow from my own punctuality. Wish me success, dear, and believe me ever yours affectionately,

“A. SINCLAIR.”

To which Mrs. Sinclair received the following reply:—

“DEAREST,—How I feel for your sad lot! It is indeed lamentable to consider how the very best women are those most severely tried. Would I were near you now to help; or, if I could not help, to condole, or perhaps better, say, sympathise.

“When I think of it, I really have no patience; though, indeed, even at the risk of offending you, I must say again, I fancy you went a little tiny bit too far that night.



Mr. Sinclair felt your remarks, I could see clearly; and although they were quite true, it was natural he should feel them—possibly on that very account.

“But then, I have not patience to think of you—dear, high-spirited, energetic, courageous creature that you are—being placed in such a position. The fact of your ability to manage his business more ably than your husband, is surely no reason why you ought to be compelled to do so; and he is compelling you, I clearly see. How he can bear your going about in those horrid omnibuses by yourself baffles my comprehension—amongst all kinds of men and women too!

“Oh, you poor thing! I could cry when I think about you—and when am I now doing anything else?

“If I am walking, I say mentally, ‘How dear Bella would enjoy this!’ When I am looking at the sweet, familiar sea, I imagine your delight were you gazing at it also.

When I am out for a drive, I consider how much good the bracing air would do you, poor darling; and when I come home from my morning dip, I think, 'What a deal of good sea-bathing would do that dear child!' But it is of no use wishing, is it, love? If wishing could bring you here, I should see the door open and you enter at this moment.

"Some day, perhaps, we may hope to enjoy this lovely place together. Meanwhile, you too will want to know something of my daily life. Really, dear, it seems to me that since I came here I have done nothing save eat, sleep, bathe, amuse myself, and talk!

"When I think of your industry I blush. We make up a pleasant party, though it is composed of incongruous materials. First there is Mrs. Hantrey, our hostess—certainly *one* of the most charming women I ever met. So far as I know she has only a single fault: she is *devoted* to a plain, heavy,

stupid husband; laughs at his tiresome jokes; humours his singular fancies; and, although it is of course impossible she can really do so, professes to believe there is no one like him on earth. Then we have an astronomer, who talks of little excepting Saturn; an author with a *dreadful* wife (why is it that nice men marry such horrid women, and *vice versa* ?); a girl who writes melancholy poetry, and thinks some day she may attain to the unhappiness of Mrs. Hemans, or end tragically like L. E. L.—that is her idea of perfect bliss; a lad who has a charming voice, and sings exquisitely, and likes, I fancy—he not being really one bit sentimental—to see tears in the eyes of those *who have eaten of life's fennel*; a widow from the Sister Isle, with neither money nor beauty, but possessed of plenty of mother-wit, and apt at repartee; together with a Mr. Munro, a *very clever* barrister, complete our party.

“The latter gentleman holds the most

advanced and correct ideas on the subject of women's capabilities, of any person—male or female—I remember to have heard speak on the subject. There is only one point on which we disagree. He says, 'There is nothing man could not make of woman; there is no height to which he might not elevate her, if he set himself heartily to the work.'

"Now I say, 'There is nothing woman could not make of herself; there is no height to which she might not rise, were she only true to herself—faithful to her noble origin.'

"You, dear, have done—you have been this. I so often speak of your noble self-denial—of your brave abnegation of social rules.

"He longs to know you: he declares you must be a 'perfect woman,' and of course, dear, I declare you are not—being utterly disloyal to you!!!

"Write constantly, and tell me all about

everything. I was *so amused* with your description of the domestic rebellion. Mr. Munro was intensely delighted to find you had hit off one weakness of his sex capitally—viz., their belief in being able to perform women's duties better than women themselves. And you, dear, and your servants always got on so capitally, and they seemed so devoted to you. But there, I must say no more, or I may vex you; for after all, are you not married, and is not your husband the first to you?

“And now, dearest, good-bye. Write as often as you can, and give me one of your charming naïve letters whenever it is possible.

“Always your lovingly attached

“M. MYRTON.”

## CHAPTER XIV.

## AN INTERRUPTED SOIRÉE.

LETTERS are ghosts, or rather accusing witnesses. They photograph our thoughts, our troubles, our wishes, our joys, our sins ; and which of these things are pleasant in the retrospect ? Not the likeness of our thoughts, for they are dead and gone ; not that of our troubles, bearing an impression we love not to remember ; not that of our wishes, which, whether gratified or ungratified, are our wishes no longer ; not that of our sins, which turn no lovely faces to us now. No : letters should be written on the sand of the sea-shore, for the next high tide to wash away from sight and memory.

First cousins, perhaps, to the grains of sand are post-cards, since one might imagine little of importance could be retained on them. Yet some people possess such exquisite tact, and have such small reluctance to wear their hearts where daws may peck, that they will dun for that five pounds, or indicate where the wound festers on an open memorandum, to save a halfpenny. It always delights me to hear of these people having used two cards for the purpose; that is to say, they write the address on one side, and the matter on the other, and then, behold, the things have stuck together, and the reverse of each is blank, and the missive has cost just a penny!

But the post-card, with all its capability in some hands for giving present annoyance, never can in the future raise such ghosts, recall such skeletons, as old letters. Take a bundle of your own, carefully hoarded by some acquaintance too fondly attached to friends and old relics to destroy one of the

valuable documents, and what do you think of the feelings, sentiments, fears, hopes, therein expressed !

Or pick out at random, from a long unused cabinet, letters you placed there in years gone by. Do you think the people who were not afraid to write would care to read them ?

There came a day, I know, when Mrs. Sinclair, finding a package of epistles crossed and recrossed, tied up with pink ribbon, and labelled "M. Myrton," flung it intact into the fire ; but that little feat of temper was far from her thoughts in the golden summer time of which I am writing.

"I fear"—so Frank's diary proceeds, after the remark already quoted concerning Catharine and Susie—"I shall never be able to keep a diary so regularly as I kept my books ; and if it be not kept regularly, of course it cannot be a diary. Shall I make it a weekly affair, as some people do their



household bills, or bring it out with the magazines? If I am to do it at all, I fancy I had better try to keep the thing properly; for, after all, events are like expenditure. It is difficult to remember the items after the lapse of twenty-four hours. What a thing habit is! When I was in business and went to the City every day, I should as soon have thought of keeping a diary as of omitting to balance my cash; and now I never balance my cash, and I keep a diary or at least attempt to do so, and feel uncomfortable at having made no entry for three days.

“What is the last event recorded?—Oh! that I was considered a Molly Coddle and a Paul Pry by my domestics. I say was, because, although they may remain of the same opinion, and probably do, they are my domestics no longer. It seems strange to write the word ‘my’ in connection with female servants, but when a man comes to be mistress of a household, he cannot well

help having something to say to those who are supposed to be under him.

“ They had never been under my wife, and that created a difficulty. So long as the Catharine for the time being took her up a comfortable breakfast, say, a couple of hours after my departure, and dressed her hair properly and made herself tidy—not to add smart towards the afternoon, when visitors were expected to call—so long as she failed in none of these arduous tasks, and the cook attended regularly to receive orders, was clever at pastry and pudding making, and could serve an omelet, or some *outré* dish, to the satisfaction of—well, suppose the Dean of Ringleton, or the honourable Mrs. Clace, or Miss Myrton, or any other favoured mortal whose society my wife affected, Bella — wisely perhaps — never troubled herself about minor details.

“ It was expensive, but then she had not to pay that expense, and it was easy. As this diary is, of course, not intended for

publication, I may hint, without treason, that I am afraid my treasure, spite of her recent early rising and commendable attention to business, is fond of ease.

“That may, however, to quote Miss Myrton, be only my ‘male want of appreciation.’

“Sometimes these very clever women have a curious elliptical way of expressing themselves—and yet not elliptical, so far as I am concerned, for I have not the remotest idea of what Miss Myrton generally thinks she means.

“No human being can imagine the satisfaction I feel at Miss Myrton’s absence ; the only drawback being, she is certain not to remain absent for ever. I wonder whether my wife has written to her an account of the servants’ defection, and if so, what she said—whether she gave the true, unvarnished narrative with which I furnished her, or one taken from the feminine and imaginative point of view. It is said that faces have

a 'mother's side:' I am sure facts have a woman's side; but this is beside the question.

"The departure of the cook and housemaid occurred in this wise:—After much exercise of spirit and a greater trial of courage than I ever had experienced, even when going to ask my bankers to discount a bill, I at length descended into the front kitchen. It was an accident which ultimately decided me to do this; but I had for days been telling myself that if I ever were to make a good mistress, I ought, once at all events, to visit my domestics' own particular domain.

"Whether I ever should have carried out this intention, however, had I not—wanting a glass of water—rung seven times for it without the slightest notice being taken of the bell, is doubtful; but as the water did not come to me, I determined to go to the water.

"As I went down the stairs I heard,

through the closely-shut door, a murmur as of many people talking, and when I turned the handle and entered, I beheld a spectacle which might not have surprised Bella, but which certainly startled me.

“On the table, covered with a fair white cloth, were spread the various delicacies of the season. A cool and refreshing salad occupied the post of honour beside the remains of a noble sirloin of beef. There was a portion of a cold ham (I made my observations subsequently, and at my leisure); there were preserves, fresh butter, new bread; a lobster—the gift, I have reason to believe, of a grateful fishmonger, for it never was charged to, or paid for by, me; radishes, red and white, water-cresses—a contribution, likewise, of a grateful green-grocer; periwinkles—the gift of one of the guests, who had carried those dainties all the way from Hatton Garden (it is a strange idiosyncrasy of female domestics that if they have the fat of the land and the increase

thereof, they still crave for water-cresses and periwinkles); there was a plum tart; there was a great jug of ale that I am confident had been often replenished during the previous half-hour; there was likewise a tea-tray, on which stood our silver teapot, ewer, and sugar-basin; and altogether the repast seemed inviting.

“Around the festive board were seated three men and four women, exclusive of the members of our own modest establishment.

“The cook presided over the tea-table department, whilst the housemaid was pressing raspberry jam on the notice of a reluctant swain.

“Into this group, I fell, so to speak, like a shell; but I did not explode, although the assembled company seemed as much frightened as if I had been composed of combustible materials.

“At once they all rose to their legs whilst a little beast of a dog, which I always detested, from under shelter of the

cook's chair, set up a series of the most frightful yelpings I ever heard.

“ ‘Would you be good enough to give me a glass of water?’ I said to Catharine. ‘I have rung seven times.’

“ ‘Yes, sir; I will bring it up in a moment, sir,’ answered Catharine, and rushed off to fetch it.

“ ‘Thank you,’ I said; ‘but as I should be sorry to disturb so pleasant a party, I will wait and take it myself. I hope, sir,’ I added, turning to the principal male figure in the foreground, ‘everything is as you like it, and that you want for nothing?’

“ ‘Thank ye,’ he replied; ‘the beef is a first-rate cut, and the beer topping.’

“ ‘I am delighted to hear it——’ I was beginning, when the cook, whose former experiences had probably made her acquainted with all the ins and outs of such poor devices as mine, broke in with—

“ ‘No, sir, you ain’t delighted a bit, and it ain’t no use a-trying a-gammoning of me,’

—there was a suspicious-looking square bottle near her, which had hitherto escaped my notice, but which connected with her thick utterance suggested gin—‘I have lived all along with respectable families who knew what was what until now, and who would have scorned such poking and prying ways, such underminded things as for gentlemen, gentlemen indeed! to come down spying out the nakedness of the land.’

“‘My good friend,’ I remonstrated, ‘it seems to me that this land is certainly not barren.’

“‘Call yourself a gentleman indeed!’ she repeated, ‘and grudging poor servants, as is up early and late a-working for your pleasure, the society of their friends once and away!’

“‘You are quite welcome to the society of your friends,’ I replied, ‘and your friends are quite welcome to the poor refreshment my larder affords, but it will be for the last time in my house.’



“ ‘ Yes, just hark at him, and he calls himself a gentleman ! ’ the woman shrieked out.

“ ‘ You clever soul, when did you ever hear me make such an assertion ? ’ I retorted. ‘ I have to work harder than any of you, and to pay a great deal more ; and the popular idea of a gentleman is some one who does nothing and walks about with his hands in his pockets. I dare say some of your friends have done both things ere now, and so are much more of gentlemen than I. However, I wish you all a very pleasant evening, and am sorry I interrupted its enjoyment.’

“ But she would not be appeased. Moved thereto partly by the knowledge that Fate, represented by myself, was walking towards her ; partly by the presence of her friends ; partly by reminiscences of my wife’s cowardly conduct in presence of a real foe ; and greatly by the stimulant of—tea, shall we say?—she recommenced.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE END OF THE SOIRÉE.

“ ‘CALLS hisself a gentleman!’ said the cook.

“ ‘My good woman,’ I said, ‘in that respect, as I have before stated, you are quite mistaken.’

“ ‘Good woman!’ she repeated hysterically. All this time that wretched dog was barking, and the company standing, and the tea—if they wanted any—cooling. ‘Good woman!’

“ ‘Is there another term which you think would suit better?’ I inquired.

“ ‘And he calls hisself a gentleman!’

she persisted. ‘You call yourself a master? Why, the very dog barks at you. You who could not feed your family, but had to let your wife, sweet lady! go and work her fingers to the bone. Master, indeed!’

“‘No, you mistake,’ was my reply, ‘I am now your mistress, and do not mind the dog in the least. When you are *quite* disengaged, but not till then, I should like to have five minutes’ talk with you. Good afternoon,’ I added, speaking to the assembled company, who were all standing staring and gaping as a street crowd stares and gapes when a horse is down, or a man run over, or a pickpocket collared; ‘and I wish you a pleasant evening.’

“With which benevolent hope—so, at least, it seemed to me—I was leaving the room, when between me and the door intervened the cook.

“She was not an agreeable sight at that moment to contemplate. The weather was warm, and she not cool. The sun inclined

one to be thirsty, and she had drunk water and something else. At the best of times she had never seemed to me a desirable person; but now she seemed something more undesirable still.

“Dressed in her best, she nevertheless looked a dowdy. Her cap was awry; her brooch had come unfastened; her sleeves, for the purpose of convenience, had been turned back, leaving her large wrists without a particle of merciful shading. Her face was red, its expression angry. Well, even the life of a mistress of a household is not all *couleur de rose*. The *dolce far niente* of a woman's life had hitherto seemed very pleasant; but now I was, in addition, to have experience of its *fortiter in re*.

“‘If you please, sir, just one word before you go; I don't want no five minutes' talk with you, nor no two minutes neither, nor half a minute, if you come to that. And you don't hope we shall spend a pleasant evening; having, with your nasty, mean,

spying, poking, undermined ways, made sure it should be quite the other thing. Drawing-rooms is for gentlefolks, and kitchings is for poor creatures who has to earn their bread in the sweat of their brows; and when gentlefolks, as they call themselves, comes down into kitchings and de-means themselves looking after candle-ends and cheeseparings, so to speak, it is time servants told masters to suit themselves, because they do not intend to stay another hour under the same roof.'

" ' You have said exactly what I intended saying to you, though I should scarcely have spoken before your friends. And now that we perfectly understand each other, perhaps you will give them their tea.'

" ' I shall give it, or I sha'n't give it, just as I like. Who are you that you should come a interfering when a acquaintance drops in promiscuous? Your dear lady would never so have demeaned herself. From week's end to week's end she never put her

foot inside this here kitching; she never inquired after bare bones that dogs could not have got a toothful off; she never went a poking after her tradespeople, nor a suspecting her faithful servants. She is a lady, she is, that it were a pleasure to serve.'

" 'Well,' I answered, 'I hope you will get just such another mistress,' and I made another step towards the door, hoping to end the controversy.

" 'Ah! that's another of your nasty sneers,' the half-tipsy wretch shrieked out. 'Catharine, have you not a word to say when you see your friend so put upon? Are you a-going to stay on in a house where things has come to such a pass? or do you intend to speak up, and tell Mr. Francis Sinclair, Esquire, that you ain't a-going to put up with his arbitrary ways, since as how—thank heaven so be!—you beant his wife?'

" 'I certainly shall not stay in a place where there is no cook,' answered Catharine loftily and yet, as it struck me, uneasily.

“ ‘Very well,’ I remarked ; ‘ come upstairs when your friends are gone, and you shall have your wages.’ ”

“ ‘ And arrears,’ suggested the cook, with an emphasis which filled me with unspeakable apprehensions.

“ ‘ Any arrears that may be due to you shall be paid after I have spoken to Mrs. Sinclair,’ I replied ; and the way being more clear, I passed out of the kitchen, hearing as I went—

“ ‘ And won’t Mrs. Sinclair like to be asked about the arrears—won’t she just ?’ ”

“ That remark decided me. Straight upstairs I went to the nursery, where Elizabeth was trying to lull the cries of our latest blessing.

“ ‘ Elizabeth,’ I said, ‘ have you a mother ?’ ”

“ ‘ No, sir, nor yet a father,’ she answered briskly. ‘ I have only an aunt as goes out nussing and charing.’ ”

“ ‘ Could she come here for a few days ?’ ”

“ ‘Here, sir—to this house?’ and Elizabeth looked dubious.

“ ‘Yes,’ I said; ‘the cook and housemaid have given me warning, and we must have some one; and I thought if you had a mother, or aunt, or anybody——’

“ ‘Oh, sir!’ cried the girl, ‘let me try. I am not up to much, but I could do more if I was let. I can make the fires, and boil the kettle, and get the breakfast; and I could get the early and late dinner—I know I could; and, sir, there have been dreadful goings on here, and it will be a good day for us all when some people leave; but don’t ask me to bring aunt—I will do it all myself till you are suited, if you will only let me.’

“ ‘Then you do not want to leave also?’ I suggested.

“ ‘Leave, sir! I do not know where I should lay my head if you turned me out, for I would never—never go to my aunt. I would rather be dead—I would indeed.’



“ Slightly comforted—for, my knowledge of even very plain cooking being limited, I felt relieved to know breakfast and dinner could be prepared without my help—I descended to the drawing-room, where Catharine soon joined me.

“ During the interval which had elapsed between my exit from the kitchen and her appearance up-stairs, she must have taken thought to many things—notably that, although work in any form is objectionable, her work in our house was not excessive; that she was not debarred from occasional tender interviews and pleasant strolls with the then lover of her choice; that our visitors were not illiberal; that my wife gave away her old-fashioned dresses, and new-fashioned ones too, instead of selling them; and that, if I were a drawback to the happiness of the Briant View Terrace household, I was yet not more of a drawback than many another master she might chance to encounter.

“Further, I suspect she thought to advance her prospects, or in other words, to have her wages raised, for she began—

“‘I have just come up, sir, to offer to stay till you can suit yourself. It would be hard for my mistress to return home and not find a servant here to do a hand’s turn for her.’

“‘It is very kind of you,’ I answered, ‘but I am suited.’

“And when I said that the ‘superior young woman’s’ face was a sight to behold.

“‘You do not wish us to leave to-night, sir, though, I suppose?’ she remarked.

“‘If your friends have gone, so that you are both quite at liberty to attend to such small matters, I wish you and the cook to pack up your boxes, and be out of this house within one hour; by that time I trust Mrs. Sinclair will have returned, and I can then ascertain what is owing to you.’

“‘As for that,’ Catharine declared, ‘she could tell me as much about that as Mrs.

Sinclair. She had put it all down in a book.'

"And the book, which being produced turned out to be 'The Good Servant's Instructor,' proved conclusively enough to me that during the past year Catharine had received about six months' wages.

"Not uplifted by this discovery, I ventured to inquire if Catharine could inform me how the cook's pecuniary matters stood.

" 'Yes, she had kept her account on the back of an old valentine.'

"And having been favoured with a sight of this document, I walked out to the shop of our nearest tradesman in order to get change for a twenty-pound note.

"When I returned, the cook opened the door and accosted me with a series of sentences which I gathered to mean: 'Did I want to see their boxes packed? Did I want to be sure they had not the plate—plate indeed!—stowed away in their trunks? Should I like to turn out their pockets?'

Did I intend to accuse her of robbery because there was a dress Mrs. Sinclair had given her among her things? Would I come up into their bedroom and bring a policeman with me?—it might save the trouble of sending one after them the next day.'

" 'My good woman,' I answered, 'it is very kind of you to suggest all this; but the only real want I have at the present moment is, that you lock your boxes with all speed, take your wages, and go.'

" 'And about their wages; she should expect her month, and board-wages into the bargain.'

" 'You shall have your wages till to-day,' I answered; 'and if I hear any more nonsense from you, I shall go for a policeman to see you off my premises.'

" 'Well, then, about a character.'

" 'You can refer any one you like to me,' I replied. 'There can be no objection to that.'

“Apparently, in all her experience she had never heard of a bad character being given, for she retreated up-stairs seemingly satisfied ; and about half an hour afterwards she and Catharine, and three of their friends who had waited, so they said, ‘to see them through it,’ drove off in a cab, laden with luggage—which cab the beer-boy, providentially coming in the very nick of time, had brought for them from a neighbouring stand.

“I feared the return of my beloved—must I confess it?—even though right as well as might was certainly on my side. I dreaded the domestic storm that I fancied must ensue when Bella discovered the decided step I had taken.

“But here again I proved wrong in my forebodings.

“When I told Arabella there were no servants, that there was no dinner, and but small prospect of supper, my darling only answered, with a smile of conscious superiority—

“ ‘ Well, dear, I suppose I can have a cup of tea ; or if not, let us go out for a walk.’

“ Here was an example held up to me, and I am not ashamed to say I felt grateful for her clemency ; but then—oh ! forgive me, Bella—I could not quite forget.”

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE PLEASURES OF HOUSEKEEPING.

“TAKING it as a whole, when a man becomes the mistress of a domestic establishment, he finds there are drawbacks to the pleasure of his position.

“Until I descended to the basement, and disturbed that pleasant little party, my life had not been totally unenviable; but from the moment the cook drove off, waving her handkerchief at the house in drunken defiance, I have experienced a sense of defeat which it would be impossible to describe in words.

“Bella’s amiability also did not, para-

doxical as it may seem, render me more comfortable. Life in the City appeared to be going on charmingly with her, while life in Briant View Terrace was progressing anything but smoothly with me. It was, of course, easy for me to say mentally that the whole fault commenced with Bella ; but this proposition, though true, failed to console as it should have done, since I could not avoid acknowledging, after two days' experience of our 'help,' that economy may be bought at too high a price, and that even an occasional party in the kitchen, and a liberal use of intoxicating liquors, may be more conducive to comfort than the most rigid virtue, if incompetent to cook a chop.

“The next morning, after the evacuation of the premises by cook and housemaid, the young nurse contrived to burn the toast, to boil the eggs hard as bullets, and to bring up the tea tasting very strongly of smoke. I sat wretched, remembering Bella's fast of the previous night ; and she made me more



wretched by saying it did not matter in the least, and that the girl would do better in time.

“If she had only been so amiable with me in the days departed! I considered. But then again, I considered, I had not been so amiable as she; I remembered swearing at our then Catharine, banging the hall door after me, and walking forth to calm my temper, when a repast was not to be had; and now, under worse circumstances, Bella only smiled, and said, ‘Never mind, dear,’ and so drove me to the verge of distraction.

“Had I told her formerly ‘not to mind,’ she would have obeyed me literally.

“The girl certainly did her best—but then that best was very bad indeed; and get a suitable servant, or rather pair of servants, I could not. Naturally, respectable women objected to me as a mistress, and those who might have been willing to overlook that drawback did not strike me as being desirable servants.

“I asked the tradespeople, I went to registry offices. I saw people, and places, and phases of character I had never before conceived had an existence. I advertised, I answered advertisements, all in vain. Two or three of our neighbours, wanting, I presume, to get rid of their own servants, kindly sent them in to me, and half Elizabeth’s time was taken up in answering the door, and replying to the questions of would-be candidates, who looked contemptuously at her face and hands, which were, I regret to say, in a chronic state of black lead and perspiration . . . . .

“Were it not for exposing my relations with Bella, I should write to Mrs. St. Clair, and request her to find me a staid and respectable person. Under the circumstances, however, this is impossible; I cannot let it be known at Mulford that Bella and I have changed sexes—that she is now a man, and I a woman; and that we have changed natures as well, since she is

now amiability itself, and I—well, the less I say about my own feelings and temper the better.

“But for very pride I should ask Bella to find me one servant, at all events; and seeing my perplexity, I think she might offer her assistance in the matter. However, she does not, and I am at length driven to accept the services of a ‘professed’ cook, who charges for her services ten and sixpence a week, with beer *ad libitum*, and five meals a day.

“When I observe that this worthy woman sleeps at home, and is supposed to have breakfasted before she comes in the morning, and to sup after she leaves at night, it will be understood that her appetite is fairly good.

“Let me not be ungrateful, however, to Mrs. Rudge—that is her name. Never before have the children rejoiced in such puddings, tarts, and sweetmeats—never before have I sat down to dinners so admir-

ably cooked, at so moderate an expense. It may be—indeed, I know it is, that Mrs. Rudge annexes small articles from our larder, but then she takes very good care that no other person has the chance of doing so.

“Farther, between her and the tradespeople there wages a war which, I believe, no laying down of arms on either side could permanently end.

“Not an article that comes to the house pleases her. The mutton is always too fat or too lean, the sirloins have not sufficient of the under-cut, the fowls are ‘poor things—just like eating money,’ the fruit is half rotten, the butter rank, the milk short measure, and thin even beyond the wont of London milk, the vegetables are stale, and the oilman’s goods nothing but trash.

“So at least I hear Mrs. Rudge stating at the side gate—though I am bound to add, none of the articles are beneath the notice of that lady when she wishes to carry them

home. The farce she makes of asking my permission before she makes up her little private bundle is really admirable.

“Up-stairs she comes with a piece of plum-tart, or possibly the fag-end of a fowl on an immense dish, and asks whether, as the item is too small to serve up again for the mid-day dinner, she may take it home for Rudge.

“Rudge, being in delicate health, likes, so his wife says, to ‘pick a bit’—meaning thereby that he is partial to scraps of bread-pudding, cupfuls of soup, the tails of soles, cold vegetables, and such like.

“Of course I well understand that, under cover of these gifts, Mrs. Rudge takes home other articles which are not gifts; but my courage has so evaporated, that were I to detect her making away with the appetising morsel I had intended for my adored one’s dinner, I should only go out and secure another morsel equally inviting.

“The woman can cook; and, after all, one

virtue in a woman covers a multitude of sins. My Bella declares such outlets never were served, and I must say I think Bella understands such things. For myself I like steaks, and Mrs. Rudge sends them up to perfection.

“But there are drawbacks. For example, Mrs. Rudge likes to take her orders direct, and she generally takes them in a bonnet. Before me now I see the woman, elderly, hungry-looking, clad in black, severe, unsuggestive of cleanliness, unappetising. Morning after morning she applies her knuckles to the breakfast-room door, and says when she enters—

“‘About dinner, sir?’

“On my word, I have scarcely got over the pang of parting from Arabella before Mrs. Rudge appears. And, unaccustomed as I am to catering for a family, the ordeal, especially in warm weather, proves hard.

“Before I became the mistress of a household, I could have sworn there were fifty

kinds of meat. Now I find them narrowed to mutton and beef, poultry, game, and fish. Variety with these materials is out of the question. After all, the feminine mind may, in Great Britain, have to contend with difficulties. Why cannot we cure elephant hams, for instance? Perhaps if we did we should not like them. I fancy Mrs. Rudge would.

“I am getting dreadfully weary of the life: there is no use in trying to make the best of it. If Bella do not give in, I must leave London for a time. The absurdity of the whole affair would be ludicrous, if the sadness were not still greater.

“Is Bella mad, or am I? Last night I tried to get her to confess she would like to remain at home for one day, but she replied with such an air of superiority, that I shall not venture on a similar question again. I wonder how the business really is going. McLean no doubt really manages it, letting her believe she is holding the

reins ; but if this be so, she will never give in. She will attribute the comparative ease in money matters, that I have been struggling for years to compass, to her own superior cleverness, and there is no knowing when she will find out her error. What ought I to do ? Having made the mistake of beginning wrongly, how am I ever to rectify it ?

“She will not listen to reason, and I can not apply force. Perhaps my better plan would be to engage a thoroughly experienced housekeeper, stop this business craze, and let Bella take her way, while I take mine. But then she might object to the housekeeper—indeed I am sure she would.

“Will no one tell me what I ought to do ? Short of emigrating or cutting my throat, I think I would do anything to end this difficulty. If it were not for the children, I might know to act. There, I will write no more to-day.

“Remembering all I hoped, all I believed,



all the fond, foolish dreams I hoped, believed, and dreamed during my courtship, I cannot help tears blinding me.

“I look at the last sentence, which I wrote three days ago, and hesitate whether I shall run my pen through it, or whether I shall let it remain, so that if Bella ever read this record she may understand how she has grieved and wounded me. I do not think she can understand that part of the affair at all, or surely she would not so gratuitously have hurt any one’s feelings. Better let the passage stand, perhaps.

“Concerning money matters I am growing anxious. Last night, for the first time Bella looked thoughtful and troubled. She ate little dinner, she fell into reverie, and seemed, when I spoke to her, to have to bring her mind back from a distance before she answered.

“Can it be that she has let anything go wrong with Allington? Scarcely, I fancy.

McLean knew the importance of that, and besides, some time has elapsed since the day his payment was due, and I should have been certain to hear of it ere now. I asked her if she were ill, and she said 'No.' I asked her if there were anything troubling her, and she said 'No,' again. I asked her if she were tired, and she said 'A little;' that the day had been intensely warm, and the office close. I asked her if she did not think she had better remain at home this morning, for a few hours at all events, and she said 'Decidedly not.'

"There is something the matter, I am confident, and of course I shall soon have to know what it is. Meantime I have my own especial cause of anxiety. Susie is certainly ill. I cannot make out what ails the child, She seems 'peeky,' and languid, and nervous. She is never happy, except when I have her in my arms. The doctors say she ought to go out of town; and I must talk to Bella about this to-night. If anything went wrong with her I should break my heart.

“Mrs. Rudge declares the child’s mother ought to be at home with her ; but from previous observation, unless Bella be greatly changed, if she were at home she would not spend much of her time with the children.

“I have spoken to Bella, and she says that if I want to go out of town I had better do so ; that it is impossible for her to go ; that there is not much the matter with Susie ; that I have indulged her too freely in cakes and fruit ; that Dr. Hirst is an old woman ; that Susie will be well enough if no fuss be made over her ; and that no doubt the children are not looked after properly—indeed, how could I expect it, with Elizabeth doing the housework, and no one else in the shape of a servant, except an old charwoman ?

“Clearly my beloved was in a very irritable frame of mind. I wonder what *is* the matter. I am quite as certain something has gone very wrong at the office, as I

am that Susie is in a very precarious state of health. I hear her crossing the hall while I write, and in another moment she will be beside my chair, saying piteously, 'Take me up, papa.'"

## CHAPTER XVII.

FROM MRS. SINCLAIR.

“MY DEAREST,—I am in such dreadful trouble, and where can I go for help save to *you*? In whom can I confide except in *you*? This business must have been wretchedly conducted. How it has been kept on for so long a time I cannot imagine. Everything is just from hand to mouth. Frank does not seem to me to have a thousand pounds in *any place*. If he have, it is certainly not at his bank, for—would you believe it?—there was not enough there to meet eleven hundred pounds, which had to be paid on the fifth. The clerk I men-

tioned in my last letter said I ought not to have parted with that two hundred and fifty pounds; but only fancy, dear, two hundred and fifty pounds being of *any* object in a *business*!

“I made some such remark to Mr. McLean, and he declared he was afraid I should find it of very great importance; that he felt confident not merely all trade connection would cease with Mr. Allington—that is the name of the gentleman—but that we should find him ‘very nasty’ (I repeat his expression) unless the affair was arranged.

“I asked him how the affair could be arranged, and he said, only by paying the money, and suggested I should see if some of Frank’s business friends could not help me. I should tell you he had mentioned this before the fifth, but I rejected the proposition because, as I assured him, Mr. Sinclair would not like me to borrow from strangers.

“To this he answered, ‘That Mr. Sinclair

would like still less to have irregularities in his payments, and that had he been fit to attend to business at all, the thing would not have happened.'

"You cannot think how miserable it makes it for me, the way in which every one will insist that Frank is ill. When I say he is well, they reply, with a sort of incredulous smile, that they are glad to hear it—delighted.

"I spoke to Mr. McLean about this the other day, as I heard him tell a gentleman he was afraid Mr. Sinclair was no better, and asked him what he imagined was the matter. After a good deal of hesitation, he answered that he supposed Mr. Sinclair's head was a little affected.

"My dear, depend upon it, he thinks Frank has softening of the brain.

"I have talked a good deal to this person about the business. He seems devoted to his employer; *very* sorry for me; though he mistakes the whole position, and I have

thought it best not to enlighten him, as there is no use in telling people everything. He is clever, too, and has been with Frank for years. The sum of what he says is this—

“For ages Frank has been ‘paying off’ that dreadful Mr. Varham—with whom, as I told you, he was once in partnership—and it has clearly left him almost penniless. The business seems to be carried on with credit; I mean, nothing appears to be paid for at the time. People sell things to Frank, and do what Mr. McLean calls ‘draw on him;’ then Frank sells these things to other people, and ‘draws’ on them. It appears to me to be altogether a muddle, and of course I cannot put it right all at once. However, dear, not to tease you with these details, we have now got enough money to pay this eleven hundred pounds except one hundred and sixty, and I want you, you rich thing, to lend it to me. Mr. McLean says we shall



be having money shortly. I asked him why we could not wait for 'shortly;' but he says if we do unpleasant consequences may follow. So, love, I write to you in all confidence.

“Most affectionately,

A. SINCLAIR.

“Mr. Allington has just been here. My dear, such a man! But I will tell you *everything* to-morrow.”

But apparently, on second thoughts, Mrs. Sinclair could not wait for the morrow, since that same night she wrote from Briant View Terrace the following epistle:—

“I cannot rest, dear, without writing to you once more. Frank seems ill at ease, and, God knows, so am I.

“What with anxieties in the City and anxieties at home, my life is not worth having. There are no servants here. Frank, indeed, has procured a woman able to cook

very well; but, beyond this, we are dependent on Elizabeth, the children's nurse. And Susie is ill, or at least Frank says so, and the doctor says so, and declares she ought to go out of town; and amongst all my troubles I believe I shall go *mad*.

"In a postscript to my letter of to-day, I told you Mr. Allington had been. Talk about men, he was a brute—simply, purely a brute!

"He came into the outer office—I heard him—and asked to see Mr. Sinclair.

" 'Mr. Sinclair,' Mr. McLean answered, 'was not at the office.'

" 'Why was he not at his office!'

" 'He is ill,' Mr. McLean replied; and I declare to you, my love, I *blessed* him in my heart for that answer. What would he have said had he known Frank only remained at home because he felt that he could manage his business no longer? Poor Frank!

" 'Ill! What ails him?'

" 'Something the matter with his head.'

“ ‘Is he mad?’

“ ‘I don’t know, sir.’

“ ‘And who is taking charge?’

“ ‘Mrs. Sinclair.’

“ ‘Why isn’t she with her husband?’

“ ‘I hope he is not so bad as that?’

“ ‘Does she know anything of the business?—but I suppose she don’t.’

“ ‘I do not think she knows much,’ answered Mr. McLean.

“ ‘Mr. Allington,’ I said, from the door of my office at this juncture, ‘perhaps you will kindly walk this way.’

“ I intended to treat him a little loftily, but it was of *no use*. The horrid creature kept on his hat, and after saying, ‘Good afternoon, ma’am,’ plunged both hands into the depths of his pockets, and commenced—

“ ‘Sorry to hear about Mr. Sinclair. Bad job, ma’am!’

“ ‘Yes,’ I answered, wondering what he would think could he see Frank at that

moment *enjoying* himself at home with the children, as I *know* he does.

“ ‘I assure you, ma’am, I find it disagreeable to have to speak to a lady on such matters; but still, you know, business is business, and money is money. Now, about that eleven hundred pounds?’ ”

“ ‘I have got it all,’ I gasped, ‘except about one hundred and sixty pounds, and that I expect to have very soon.’ ”

“ ‘How soon?’ he asked.

“ ‘I have written to ask a friend for it to-day, and I shall have it, if she be at home, by return of post.’ ”

“ ‘And if she be not at home?’ ”

“ ‘But I have every reason to suppose she is.’ ”

“ ‘What reason, if I may inquire?’ ”

“ ‘I had a note from her the day before yesterday,’ and then, seeing he did not believe me—the horrid wretch—I took your dear three lines out of my pocket and placed them in his *large, fat hand* (forgive the pro-

fanation, but it seemed necessary. I never thought I should have to do with people who doubted my *word*, and I do think Frank sometimes must have been tried).

“He read your loving words out loud, holding the paper at arm’s-length, contemplating it through a great pair of spectacles that he placed leisurely on his horrid nose.

“‘That is the lady, then?’ he said, when having finished, he gave me your sweet note back again, ‘from whom you are to have the money?’

“I answered, ‘Yes, it was.’

“‘Then, ma’am,’ he remarked, ‘I will go round to the firm who hold your husband’s bill, to ask them to take no steps till to-morrow afternoon. I think they will do this for *me*; and I hope you will get the money, and I am sorry to see a lady so situated.’ Having given utterance to which remark, he held out a hand that reminded me of an elephant’s foot, and took, to my intense

relief, his large, ungainly person out of the office.

"When he went out Mr. McLean came in. Really I like that man, he is so respectful, and yet so sympathising. He wanted to know the result of the interview, and so I told him *everything*—when I hoped to get the money, and from whom.

"He looked very grave, and asked if he should not go round to Mr. Varham ; 'Because,' he said 'the matter is now becoming serious, and if we cannot pay the amount I am afraid of the consequences.'

" 'What consequences ?' I inquired.

" 'Why, ma'am,' he said, 'they could take Mr. Sinclair now if they liked. It is evident they are only holding back because they are sorry for you and for Mr. Sinclair's illness.'

" 'They !—who are they !'

" 'Mr. Allington and his firm. He is the London partner of a great house in Nottingham.'

“ ‘What do you mean by “take” Mr. Sinclair?’ I asked.

“For a moment he hesitated, then he said, ‘Lock him up.’

“ ‘Lock him up! Where?’ My dear I was so confused, I mixed up Bedlam and all sorts of places.

“ ‘In prison,’ was the reply.

“ ‘In prison?’ I almost shrieked. ‘What has he done?’

“ ‘Failed to meet his engagements; in other words, failed to meet that acceptance.’

“Dearest, conceive of it! And Frank has let such a risk be run! and these are men’s laws against men! Can we wonder, therefore, at their conduct to women?

“I shall go to bed to-night and dream of poor Frank lying on straw, and having chains on his feet and hands. Write, dearest, and relieve the frantic anxiety of

“Your devoted Friend,

“A. SINCLAIR.

“Only fancy, my dear, if they even *imagined* Frank had nothing the matter with him, save his extraordinary ideas! Poor Frank! Really it is all very pitiable, and he has not *a notion* of it. I keep the whole trouble locked away. *Would he do so much?*—or any man? Poor Frank?”

It was quite as fortunate for “poor Frank,” in those days, that he had not the remotest idea of the extent of his wife’s consideration. Latterly he had not slept very well; but could he have formed an idea of the way business had been retrograding and disagreeable affairs progressing, in the City, he might not have slept at all.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

MR. MCLEAN TO MR. VARHAM.

HAPPILY it is given to women to get dreadfully frightened, but still never perfectly to understand—that is to say, a woman takes alarm rapidly, but she is fortunate in so far as she never grasps the whole of a trouble at a first glance.

It is customary to talk of a woman's imagination as vivid; but if so, it is vivid only to a limited extent.

If the kitchen chimney be on fire, she may conjure up visions of flame to the seventh heaven; but if flames be blazing to the seventh heaven, she fails to realise

blackened walls, roofless homestead and the silence of despair.

For my own part, I do not believe the woman ever lived whose imagination enabled her thoroughly to realise the meaning, say, of the single word "ruin;" and I can scarcely credit that even the virtues of an Act of Parliament will assist her to the extent indicated.

The feminine mind can picture things in a dreadful state of excitement, but it fails to picture them in the state which follows that excitement. Paris during the siege, with shells bursting and cannon roaring, it was not impossible for a woman's imagination to conceive; but beautiful Paris desolated; gay Paris silent; smiling Paris sitting weeping amid her own ruins: these things are to her facts spoken as parables.

No doubt, in the good time coming, women shall have become so like men that they will be able at once to compass the meaning of "bankruptcy," "ruin," "re-

trenchment," "retirement," as well as men can now; but then they will not be women, only a smaller sort of man!

Abstract questions of this kind, however, had no place in Frank Sinclair's meditations.

He was concerned with himself for himself—himself, of course, including wife, children, reputation. On the one side was possible ruin, on the other the memory of that wretched period of his life when nothing he could do was right, and nothing Bella could do was wrong.

If he gave in now, if he went to his office and resumed the reins of government, domestic matters would, he knew, drift back to their former position; whilst, on the other hand, if he did not take some decisive step—if he stayed at home with the children, and continued to spend his days in idleness, all the labour of years would, he knew, be lost; and even supposing bankruptcy were averted, the uphill work he once thought over would have to be continued, perhaps, to the end of life.

Well, let it, he decided. Better that—better anything than a discontented wife—a wretched home. Better even to procure a situation, than for Bella and him to lead the existence which once obtained in Briant View Terrace. Of two evils he chose the evil he considered least, never taking into consideration the fact that all Bella really wanted was a tighter hand and less gentle tenderness than he had hitherto employed.

But Frank Sinclair could not be ungentle; he could not return taunt for taunt—reproach his wife with having wasted hard-earned money; for having learned nothing from the severely economical training of her youth, save how—when opportunity offered—to spend lavishly and uselessly in her husband's home.

It was not in Frank to do any one of these things. He could only, having commenced a negative sort of battle, fight it silently out, opposing to force that kind of passive resistance which is more annoying and more

difficult to deal with than any active warfare.

During the whole combat, however—that is, after the first couple of days—he understood perfectly well he was playing with edged tools, which could, and very possibly would, injure him most seriously.

But then, there are cancers so terrible that the patient ceases to dread the surgeon's knife; and there are family troubles which eventually become so intolerable that a man feels, even if the sky fall in the attempt, it were better to make a change.

And all the while things were getting worse in the City, as the following letter from Mr. McLean to Mr. Varham will explain. Mr. McLean had been clerk in the office when Varham and Sinclair were partners. He was now manager in Frank's office, having elected to cast in his lot with Mr. Sinclair.

For him, however, Mr. Varham had always entertained the highest respect, and

therefore, though he was grieved, he did not feel surprised when he opened Mr. McLean's letter, and read :—

“—— Lane, London, Sept. 30th, 18—.

“DEAR SIR,—Knowing the friendship you have always entertained for my employer, I went round last evening to your office, hoping to see you concerning some private matters of Mr. Sinclair's. Hearing you were out of town, and likely to be so for some time, I took the liberty of asking Hudson for your address, and trust you will excuse my writing this letter.

“I am sorry to say Mr. Sinclair has not been able to come to business for a long time past. I am still more sorry to say Mrs. Sinclair has been able.

“I do not intend by the foregoing remark the slightest disrespect to that lady; but affairs have, in consequence of her interference, got into terrible confusion, and it is on this account I venture to ask your advice and—assistance.

“As you are aware, on the fifth of each month we have been in the habit of making regular payments to Mr. Allington, and hitherto everything has given way to that. These payments one month under another were regarded as equivalent to cash, and the discount was in itself, a handsome income.

“Mrs. Sinclair, being unacquainted with these business details, and paying no attention to me when I ventured to explain them, paid away a sum of money to a person who has set up a claim against Mr. Sinclair, wrong in every particular ; and the consequence is, Allington’s last draft is still unsettled.

“I have written to Mr. Sinclair on the subject, but he returned my letters unopened, saying, ‘he left everything to Mrs. Sinclair ;’ and when I called, he repeated what he said at the beginning of his illness, namely, that for reasons which he could not explain, he had decided to remain at home, and leave the whole management of his business to Mrs. Sinclair.

“He is much changed since I last saw him, and seems irritable and despondent. It is pitiable to witness poor Mrs. Sinclair’s distress. She cries half the day, I think, and literally trembles when she hears Mr. Allington’s voice. Not being accustomed to business or business ways, she thinks he is treating her cruelly; but he has been, I assure you, much more patient and lenient than I expected.

“He offered to take the amount lying at the bank, and let the balance stand over to next month; but to do this it was necessary to get a cheque from Mr. Sinclair, and this Mrs. Sinclair said she could not do.

“‘Is he really so bad as that?’ Mr. Allington asked; and then Mrs. Sinclair covered her face, and sobbed like a child.

“‘Bless my soul!’ he went on, ‘you had better apply for some power to act for him. Things will go to wreck and ruin if you let them drift like this. You have got your children as well as his creditors to



consider. Have you no male relation whom you can consult ?’

“ But she only shook her head in reply.

“ ‘ That lady did not send you the money then ? ’ he asked.

“ ‘ No, she could not spare it ; and I have written to two or three other friends, but *no one* seems to have any money.’

“ ‘ And the worst of it is, Mr. Allington,’ I said at this juncture, ‘ that our trade is totally at a standstill. Of course, till this matter is settled we cannot order any more goods from you ; and in Mr. Sinclair’s state of health, it is impossible for transactions to be opened with any other house. Our payments, beyond what is required for current expenses, do not come in till the twenty-ninth.’

“ ‘ Can you certainly pay the amount then ? ’ he asked.

“ I said, yes, we could ; and to my great relief, he promised to wait till the thirtieth, and then re-apply.

“Knowing what he is, I must say I felt agreeably surprised at his leniency; but his manner annoys Mrs. Sinclair greatly, and she is besides sadly vexed at the way in which her friends hold aloof. I believe she thought she had nothing to do but ask and have, and not only has no one helped, but no one has even come to see her.

“If I could induce her to remain at home, I think I might pull things round even now, although, with no business doing, the prospect is not bright. I wish you would advise me as to the best course to pursue. If I were able to open an account with some other house on equally advantageous terms, I should not feel afraid; but so long as Mrs. Sinclair insists on coming to the office that is hopeless, since people at once inquire why she is here, and so of course hear of Mr. Sinclair's illness. As it is, creditors are pressing on all sides, and I have been compelled to pay accounts which really are scarcely due, in order to avoid pro-

ceedings ; so that when Allington is paid his last draft, I shall be even less prepared than the last time for that coming due on the fifth of October.

“I trust you will pardon the liberty I have taken in troubling you with all these details, but I felt I could not stand by and see a good business going to the dogs, if any act of mine could avert it.

“Hoping soon to hear from you,

“I am, dear Sir,

“Yours respectfully,

“J. S. McLEAN.”

From town to town this letter, which was posted just three days too late to reach Mr. Varham at the address furnished by his manager, followed that gentleman ; and when at length he received it, he was in Paris, where he intended to remain for a week before returning to England, after a prolonged and profitable business journey.

When he had read Mr. McLean's communication, however, twice over—the first time hurriedly, the second slowly and carefully—he asked for his bill, packed his portmanteau, and started for London within an hour.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### SANE OR INSANE ?

“POOR Sinclair !” thought Mr. Varham ;  
“it is that discontented cat who has driven him out of his mind. And they have a tribe of children, too, I believe. Well, there is something to be said on each side of a question. Here have I often murmured because I was left so soon a widower, with never a son to come after me, never a daughter to grow up and fill her mother’s place ; but surely that is better than to marry as Sinclair did, and bring a lot of poor helpless creatures into the world, and then to go mad and leave

them to shift for themselves as best they can.

“It is horrid to think of. And what a pleasant, cheerful, happy fellow Frank was once, to be sure—in the days when we were careless bachelors together! After all, there are no friendships like those formed in youth. I am sorry I ever let any woman come between us. He has had a struggle, and it has not been all profit to me.”

And so his thoughts ran on during the whole of that return journey. Arrived in London, he went straight to Frank's office, even before calling at his own.

There, perched on a high stool, sat McLean disconsolate, his elbows resting on the desk, and his chin supported by his hands, looking the very picture of despair.

When Mr. Varham entered he got down from his stool, and returned that gentlemen's greeting sadly.

“I did not receive your letter till yester-

day," began Mr. Varham. "I had left Guernsey when it arrived there. Now, what can I do to help you?"

"I do not think you can do anything, sir, unless it be to tell me whether I ought to lock up the office and go away."

"Why, what has happened? Is Mr. Sinclair worse?"

"It appears there never was anything the matter with him—at least, so Allington says."

"Then why is he not here?"

"He is not here now for a very sufficient reason, because he is in Whitecross Street Prison, and likely, so far as I can hear, to remain there. Allington thinks he has only been shamming illness; but I feel sure he must be hopelessly mad. I have had a letter from him, in which he declares that all questions must be referred to Mrs. Sinclair, and he further states that he does not at all dislike being in Whitecross Street. And Mrs. Sinclair, when I went up there last

night, was in hysterics ; and one of the children, it seems, is dying ; and the landlord, hearing of Mr. Sinclair's arrest, has put in a distress for the rent ; and there is not a soul who can answer a question, or give the slightest information on any subject, except a lady—Mrs. Sinclair's sister, I think—for whom Mr. Sinclair sent before he left home.

“There, I cannot understand it. I cannot make head or tail of the business. It is beyond flesh and blood to stay here and be bullied by Allington, who comes in two or three times a-day to say we are all swindlers together, and that he is not sure he shall not prosecute us criminally for conspiracy. A man from whom I ordered some goods, a few days before this happened, is simply furious. If I had enough money I would leave the country—that I would.”

“Bless my heart ! ” exclaimed Mr. Varham, who had not heard one word



of the latter part of McLean's harangue.

"To think it ever should have come to this! and with Sinclair, too, of all men!"

## CHAPTER XX.

### MR. SINCLAIR'S DIARY RESUMED.

“ *Whitecross Street, Oct. 18th.*—I am very glad I commenced to keep a diary. It seemed a foolish thing to attempt at first; but it has not only wiled away, many an anxious quarter of an hour at home, but suggested to me the idea of taking to literature as a profession.

“To be sure it is rather late in life for me to turn author, but everything must have a beginning; and, as it seems extremely probable I shall have to remain here for the remainder of my natural life, I may as well try to earn a few pounds for my family as not. My family—oh! Susie, my little daughter,

I wonder how you are this morning. How the hours lengthen out while I am waiting for Patty's notes! What a fool I have been—what an obstinate, selfish, wicked idiot! What did it matter whether my home were comfortable or the reverse, what did it signify whether Bella spent much money or little, I should have stuck to my post and earned money, I should have borne everything she liked to thrust upon me, rather than have courted ruin and poverty in this way.

“For my courtship of misfortune, which I merely intended should be a passing flirtation, has only proved too successful. Ruin and I have entered the matrimonial estate together. She has grasped my hand with a clutch strong and cruel as death, and taken me and my fortunes for better for worse. Further, she has agreed to provide for me, and this is the lordly mansion I and my grim bride inhabit. I cannot realise it all yet. I cannot understand how it has come about. Let me read McLean's letter

once again. I believe I was mad when it arrived, for I wrote some ridiculous reply, that I now feel very much ashamed of having penned. I must ask him to come here and explain how matters stand. I ought also to see a solicitor. What am I to say to any sensible man, however, on the subject? How can I ever confess the length and breadth and depth of my stupid folly? Not even to Patty could I tell how criminally weak I have been.

“The provocation appears so slight, the insanity so incredible; but yet, small though the drop of water may have been, it had gone on dripping for so long a time that it had worn into my very brain. And now Bella does not write to me. Patty says she is ill, but still she is not confined to her room. I told Patty she must neither come here again nor allow Bella to come, nevertheless I expected a letter.

“Were it not for Patty, I should not know whether Susie were alive or dead.

“ How did it all happen ? I must try to make sense out of what seems to me little more real than a dream. For days and days I had noticed Bella was desponding, but as she resolutely refused to take me into her confidence, I arrived gradually at the conclusion that she was getting tired of City life, only she had not sufficient moral courage to say so.

“ Further, I was much concerned about Susie. How those children have twined themselves into every thought of my life ! I imagined I loved them, well six months since, but the feeling I had then was by comparison superficial to that I bear towards them now.

“ Susie is dangerously ill now ; she was sickening for that illness then, and the doctor told me she must leave town, or that a longer journey might be in store for her. Will she set out on that without my seeing her again—shall I never kiss my child—never feel her soft hand in mine—never

push the hair back from her forehead more ?

“ Has it really come to this, that with my little one in all probability dying, I am not able to go and see her ? I deserved to drink a bitter cup for my folly, but surely this is draining it to the dregs !

“ To resume my story. Susie was ill ; the doctor said she ought to have change of air. Bella declared it was impossible she could leave. It was equally impossible for me to send the child to Mulford, under existing circumstances ; so I asked Bella whether she did not think, as my remaining in London seemed useless, that it might be well for me to take the children away for a fortnight or so to Margate.

“ She, I suggested—and it was an ill-natured suggestion for which I am now sorry—could come down once a week by the ‘ Husbands’ Boat.’

“ To this Bella assented — not to the coming down by that special conveyance,

but to the scheme generally. Looking back, I believe she felt my absence would be a relief, but of course I could not know this by intuition.

“Ah! my dear, times have changed since I read poetry and you darned stockings in the Rectory arbour. Perhaps we were both hypocrites then, and that poetry was as foreign to my nature as darning stockings to yours.

“It is a strange thing that when people are married, and no means of escape possible, they should take such pains to make one another uncomfortable, whilst before the knot is tied they lure each other on and on, by all manner of sweet devices, to the fatal plunge, just as though lovers turned deceivers for the express purpose of making themselves and others wretched. Supposing, for instance, I had not read poetry, or Bella mended stockings—but what is the use of supposing anything about it? My poetry has found its realisation in White-

cross Street, and Bella's prosaism has enabled her to take a flight out of her own domain, as daring as it has proved disastrous.

"But to pick up the dropped thread of my reminiscences. To Margate I went, in order to look out suitable lodgings, and having secured these, I started on my return to town, *via* Thames Haven.

"After I had been on board for a little while, I beheld amongst the passengers a man whose face I recognised. We had done business together for years; and, unaware that any cause existed for dissatisfaction, I made my way to him, and, stretching out my hand, said cordially—

"'Good morning, Allington.' Whereupon, to my intense surprise, he thrust both his hands into the lowest depths of his trousers-pockets, and looked me all over without uttering a word.

"There was a little circle about us in a moment. The slight had been too palpable to escape attention, and I was too much



astonished and dismayed even to make an effort to cover my discomfiture.

“After a second’s pause, which seemed to me long as eternity, Mr. Allington began with an ironical ring in his voice that maddened me—

“‘I am glad to see you looking so well, sir.’

“‘Thank you,’ I said, ‘I am very well.’

“‘Then, sir, if you are very well, sir, all I have to remark is, you are an unprincipled vagabond and a liar—and a cheat—a cheat, sir!’

“Without any more ado I knocked him down; that is to say, I sent him into the arms of an admiring audience, some of whom succumbed under his weight, and went sprawling on the deck instead. It could not be considered a prudent action, but it was the only one which occurred to me, and I struck straight out as I have said, whilst some of the bystanders applauded and others cried ‘Shame!’”

## CHAPTER XXI.

“A GENTLEMAN TO SEE YOU, SIR!”

“FOAMING with rage, Mr. Allington, so soon as he recovered his feet, rushed at me, and what the result might have proved had not a couple of gentlemen dragged him back, I cannot tell; for my blood was up, and I should not have stood nice about the degree of punishment I inflicted.

“However, the gentlemen did interfere, for which reason, perhaps, I am now in Whitecross Street instead of Newgate.

“‘Never mind,’ Mr. Allington sputtered, almost black in the face from the tight hold one man had laid on his high, old-fashioned

satin stock—'Never mind, you will live to rue this morning's work, Mr. Sinclair. It is a fine thing first to rob a creditor and then assault him. It is brave to sit smoking at home and to take your pleasure abroad, and leave a woman to bear the brunt of a battle you have not courage to fight out yourself.'

"'If you bring my wife's name into this discussion I will kill you,' I answered; and I suppose I looked like a murderer, for one sailor seized my right arm, and another my left.

"'Let me go,' I said; 'the man is safe enough for me now, if he will only do as I tell him. Mr. Allington,' I went on, 'it seems you have some ground of complaint against me, real or fancied. I should like to know what that ground is. Am I in your debt?'

"'As you are well aware.'

"'Will you believe me if I declare, on my word of honour, that I was not aware of it until this moment?'

“‘No. A man who has acted as you have done, can have no sense of honour left. It may be all very well for you to try to produce an effect on these gentlemen, but you can produce none on me.’

“‘Not after all the years we have done business together?’

“‘No.’

“‘Not after all the money I have honestly and regularly paid you?’

“‘No. It is of no use your trying to humbug me. I would not believe you now on your oath.’

“I did not strike him this time. I did not answer him. My arms dropped powerless by my side, and I walked away to a quiet part of the vessel, where I stood for the remainder of the journey, looking at the Thames.

“If ever I contemplated self-destruction, it was then. If ever death and the river tempted me, it was then. If ever I felt that the burthen of life could be endured no longer, it was then.

"I despised myself—I cursed the folly which had brought me into such a predicament. I felt I could never again hold up my head amongst my fellows. By my own act I had placed myself outside the pale, and all for what? Ay, there was the rub: what had I proposed to myself as the reward for such madness?

"Now the crisis had come, I could not tell what real benefit I ever expected to arise from the course adopted. Did I once believe circumstances and experience could alter Bella's nature? I now felt how delusive had been such a hope; and as I stood there writhing under the humiliation I had received, smarting because of words which had lashed me like scorpions, I determined that not for another day should this state of things continue. I would go home, have my wife's clothes packed up, and then, on her return, tell her I had decided she and the children must leave town, whilst I remained behind to strive and save my business from utter shipwreck.

“Looking back at it now, I wonder any man on board the steamer felt the smallest sympathy with me ; but some did. Two or three came round after a time, and talked kindly and wisely about the disturbance. They wanted me to explain matters fully ; to justify myself and disprove the words—so one of them said—‘of that over-fed bully ;’ to make peace, another advised, with my creditor, if it were possible.

“Explanation, however, was impossible—as impossible as making peace. I could not tell any rational human being that all the trouble had been brought about by my own folly and obstinacy ; that I had actually stayed at home and played with the children, and interested myself in the peculations of drunken servants, the while ruin was coming as fast as it could come—and all this because I failed to get a cup of tea on my return from business, and entertained a rooted dislike to the society of that, no doubt, most estimable lady, Miss Myrton.

"What an endless journey that seemed! —though it came to an end at last. What a contrast the dead calm of Briant View Terrace appeared to the scene on the deck of the steamer! I sat down for a time in the dining-room, alone, sending even Susie away, for the child's fretful restlessness worried me beyond measure, and tried to brace up my nerves—unstrung as they were by the bitter humiliation undergone—but the more I thought of the matter, the worse I thought of it.

"How was it possible to retrieve my position? I could not even go through the Bankruptcy Court and begin the world over again.

"What was I to do? With credit destroyed, with my connection broken up, with the memory of unutterable folly weighing me down, how could the future ever be faced?

"I felt then as, no doubt, many a poor wretch has felt when in the grey morning

light he awoke to the consciousness that a ghastly end was at hand—that, incapable of altering his doom, he must meet the worst, and wait for Calcraft, and the chaplain, and the sea of upturned countenances, that had all to be faced before he might be permitted to slip from the sight and memory of his fellows into the presence of his Creator.

“Elizabeth brought me something to eat, but the food remained untouched. Hour after hour went by, and the silence seemed to deepen—the calm to lengthen itself out, a desert of inaction. Presently Bella would be home, and I should then have to talk to her—ah, Bella! I felt very sorry for you that afternoon; much more so than I do now, for you have never written a line to me since this trouble came, and I thought how it would be best to speak so that I might win your confidence, and, if it pleased God, win together with it your affection back once more. Surely you cared for me once, my dear. It could not have been all acting



while you seemed so happy and so loving, while we strolled side by side together along the winding lanes, and across the pleasant fields lying all around Mulford.

"Elizabeth brought in candles, made up the fire, for the evening was chilly, and drew the curtains. The room looked cheerful and warm and homelike, and reminded me of how much a man who has gathered household gods about him has to lose. Well, I did not mean to lose if I could help it. Through the open door I heard the voices of my children, subdued, for Elizabeth had told them she thought their papa was ill. For their sakes I would go back to the City and boldly face the sneers of creditors, and the contempt of friends. I would acknowledge my sin, though not its cause. I would say I meant to pay every one, but that I must have time given me to see exactly how I stood. The first day, I said to myself, would be the worst; after that the thing must grow easier.

“ I waited anxiously for my wife's return. After dinner, sitting before that cheerful fire, I meant to commence my story ; and like all people who have something unpleasant to do, though I dreaded the approach of the moment of explanation, still I wished it over.

“ ‘ There ! surely that must be she,’ I thought, and then I marvelled because, while the sound of steps came up the garden, I had not heard the omnibus stop before the house.

“ No ! it was not Bella. My beloved availed herself of the doubtful luxury of a latch-key, whilst this latter visitor knocked imposingly.

“ ‘ Is Mr. Sinclair within ? ’ I heard some one ask, and Elizabeth answered, ‘ Yes.’

“ ‘ Is he engaged ? ’ was the next question, and Elizabeth answered, ‘ No ’ — adding, ‘ What name please, sir ? ’

“ ‘ He would not know my name,’ was the reply. ‘ I shall not detain him two minutes.’

"Whereupon Elizabeth opened the door, and merely announcing, 'A gentleman to see you, sir,' admitted my visitor.

"I may as well say at once I did not like the look of him, although that might have been prejudice on my part.

"There was something about the man's face, dress, expression, walk, and manner, which filled me, unsuspecting as I was of that form of coming evil, with a vague foreboding.

"The dinner-table was laid, the fire burned cheerfully, the furniture was good, the apartments respectable. I saw the man taking in every detail, and without knowing why or wherefore, by some curious instinct, I felt as one might do who beholds some shrine holy to him profaned—some hitherto sacred place rendered 'unclean.'

"'I have come upon rather unpleasant business,' said the stranger, after an awkward bow.

"'Then the sooner we go into it, the sooner it will be over,' I replied.

“‘It is really very disagreeable,’ he fenced.

“‘Come to the point, sir, if you please,’ was my answer. ‘I am neither a child nor a woman, and can bear, I have no doubt, whatever it may be you have come to say.’

“‘It is such an awkward time,’ he went on, glancing over again at the fire and the dinner-table, at the pictures hanging on the wall, at the substantial furniture.

“‘In a word, what is your business?’ I demanded.

“‘I have a writ here, at the suit of Allington,’ he answered, producing it. doubt you will be able to arrange the matter at once, but still, till it is arranged, I must ask you to accompany me.’

“‘Where?’ I asked.

“‘Oh! we will make it as comfortable for you as we can. Mr. Sloman will be very glad to find you a room.’

“‘Possibly,’ I replied, ‘but I am not going to Mr. Sloman’s. Since Mr. Allington

has elected to take this course, I shall choose Whitecross Street. I have not the remotest idea how my affairs stand, but Mr. Allington shall have no preference out of my estate. May I write a couple of notes?'

" 'Certainly, sir.'

" 'Will you take a glass of wine?'

" 'Much obliged, sir.'

" 'Port or sherry?'

" 'Whichever is most convenient.'

" 'They are both on the table.'

" 'Port, then, if you please, sir.'

"I poured him out a glassful, which he drank off at a gulp. It was inhospitable, but I sincerely wished it had choked him.

" 'Pray help yourself,' I said after a pause, looking up from my writing.

"He coughed and then kindly said he would—and he did, first at my invitation and then at his own.

" 'That is very good wine,' he was kind enough to remark; 'if you do not mind, I will take another half a glass.'

“ ‘ By all means,’ I replied, and he finished the decanter. Should it ever be my lot to receive that gentleman in my house again, he would, I doubt not, be discreetly civil; but my politeness at that time could scarcely be called disinterested.”

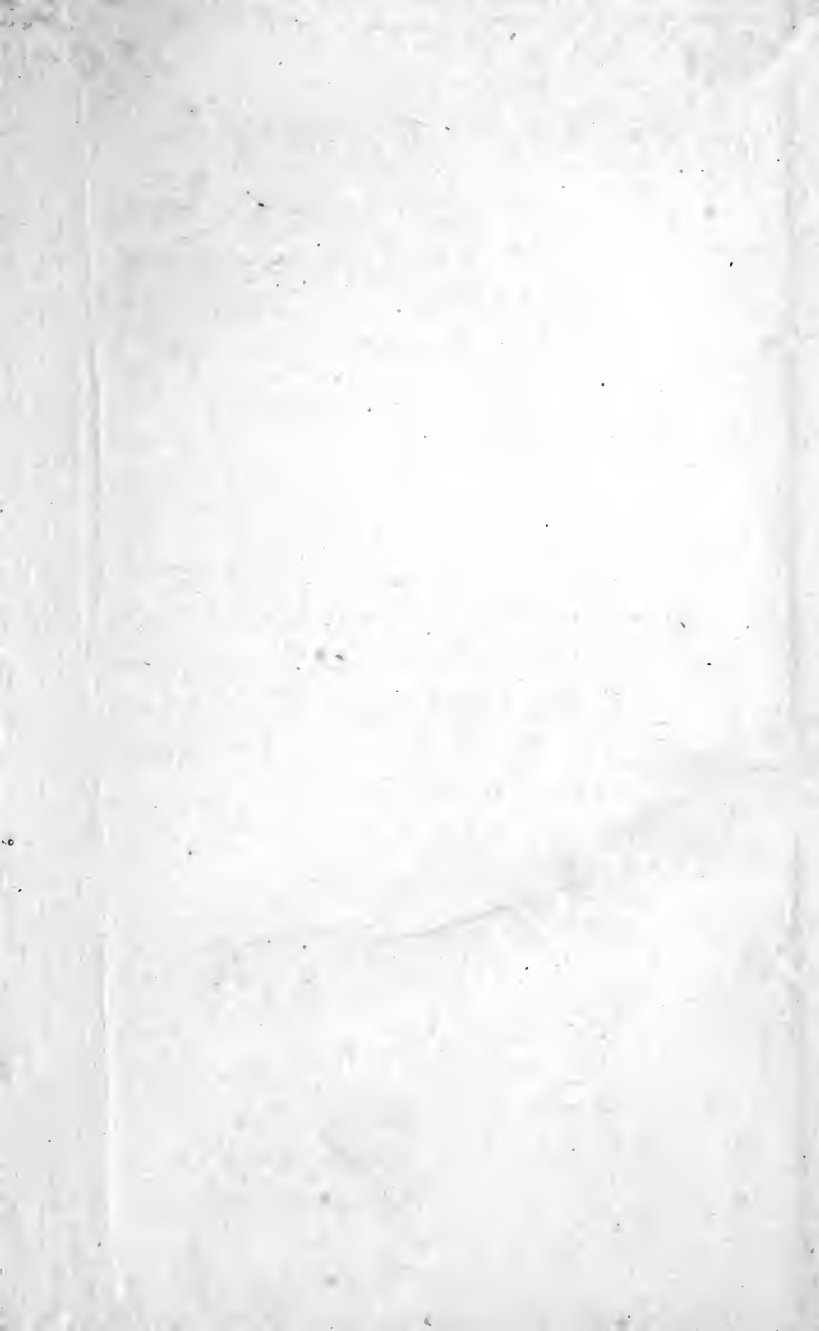
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